

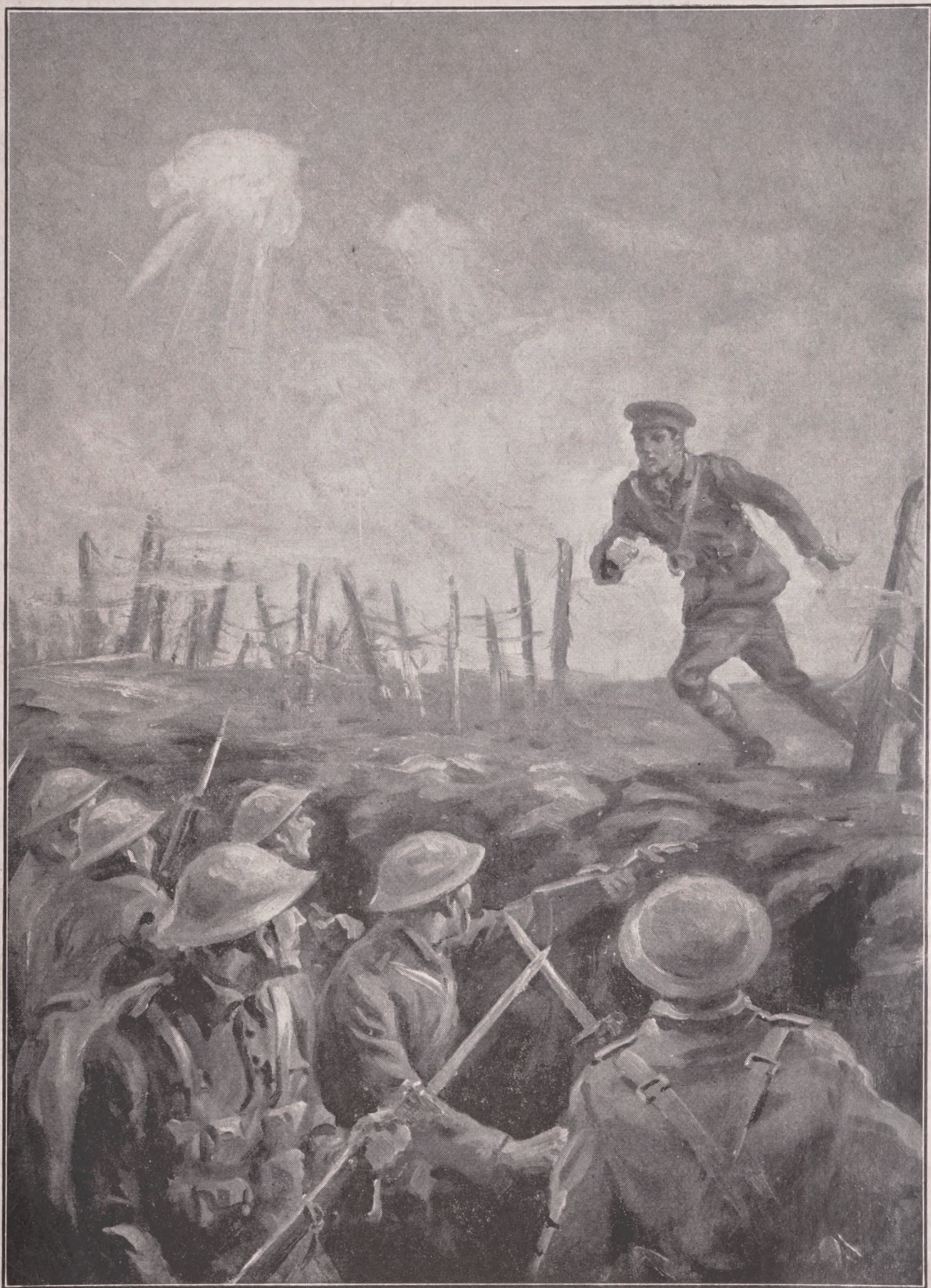


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“He fled across No Man’s Land, when suddenly the report of a rifle was heard”

BOB COOK'S BROTHER IN THE TRENCHES

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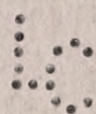
BY

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etc., etc.

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THE FLAG AND COUNTRY SERIES

By Paul G. Tomlinson

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BOB COOK AND THE GERMAN SPY

BOB COOK AND THE GERMAN AIR FLEET

BOB COOK'S BROTHER IN THE TRENCHES

(Other volumes in preparation)

BARSE & HOPKINS

PUBLISHERS

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Bob Cook's Brother in the Trenches

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PREFACE

The interest of the young readers in the preceding volumes of this series provides the explanation for this new book. The author sincerely hopes that his young friends will still be glad to follow the fortunes of Bob Cook and his brother. All the incidents used in this tale are based upon authentic reports from the Front. The writer has endeavored to make his young heroes neither unnaturally brave nor preternaturally daring. They are simply normal American boys, doing what thousands of others are doing to-day. Their adventures are not unlike those which many of our American soldiers on the Western Front are sharing.

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BOB COOK'S BROTHER IN THE TRENCHES

CHAPTER I

THE ARTILLERY SPEAKS

IT was night. A cold wind swept across No Man's Land, chilling everything with its damp breath, and the rain fell in torrents. Everywhere there was mud; the trenches were knee-deep with icy water and underneath the water was mud. The surrounding country was a waste of mud and slime. Walking was almost out of the question, while supply trains and ammunition-wagons often became so firmly imbedded in the sticky substance that much time and almost herculean efforts were necessary to free them and start them on their way once more.

In a dugout in the first line trenches were three men, all American officers. On the floor of their underground shelter was a small wood-burning

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stove, and on it was a kettle of hot water, boiling in preparation for the making of tea. One of the men had just entered the dugout, and was now removing his rubber coat and hat. He hung them in the corner, and then approached the fire, extending his hands to the warmth and rubbing them together briskly.

“So this is sunny France,” he exclaimed disgustedly. “Personally I’ve only seen about two sunny days since I landed.”

The speaker was Harold Cook. Upon the entrance of the United States into the war he had received permission from the National Guard unit of which he was a member to attend the Reserve Officers Training Camp at Plattsburg. There he had been granted a commission as a first lieutenant of infantry and been sent to Camp Dix at Wrightstown, New Jersey. He had spent some time there training the men of the National Army and then soon had been sent abroad with an infantry regiment belonging to one of the divisions of the American Expeditionary Army.

Several months had been spent in France in learning the latest methods of waging modern warfare. Grenade throwing, rifle and machine gun work, bayonet practice, the way to attack a

hostile trench, every detail that a soldier should know before taking his place on the firing line were carefully taught and learned. At length their instructors decided that they knew their lessons well enough to move into the trenches. Their first visit there had been brief, just long enough to accustom them to what they might expect under trench conditions, but now they were old hands at the game. The novelty had worn off and they realized that war is a grim, hard business.

Harold Cook was rather slight in build, though strong and wiry, and possessed of an unusual amount of endurance. He had light brown hair, blue eyes, and a smile which no one could resist. But he did not smile as much as formerly; the Kaiser had tried to make the world do Germany's bidding, and the result was that many people, whose lives had previously been happy and smiling, now looked older and more serious, there were lines on their faces and oftentimes a sad expression around their eyes. Harold Cook's eyes showed that he had become a man in experience, even though he was still a boy in years. War leaves its mark on every one whose path it crosses.

The Cook family had responded patriotically

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to the call of their country. Mr. Cook's factory was engaged in the manufacture of war supplies for the government, Mrs. Cook and her daughter were among the most active workers in the Red Cross in their home town of High Ridge, and Harold's younger brother Bob was doing his bit. At the time of the American declaration of war Bob and his friend, Hugh Reith, were too young to enlist, but they had aided the government by the apprehension of a band of spies and plotters operating in High Ridge. Later they had been enabled to cross the ocean to France and take service in the Lafayette Escadrille, the famous flying squadron which counted so many young Americans among its number; they had distinguished themselves, and later on had been transferred to the United States Army. Right now they were attached to one of the American squadrons operating over the front, held by their fellow Americans.

"I guess you don't like this weather, do you?" observed one of the officers in the dugout, replying to Harold's remark.

"Like it?" exclaimed Harold. "I despise it. The only thing that can exist in this kind of place is a duck."

“How about a fish?” laughed Captain Norris, for that was the name of the officer who had addressed the remark to Harold.

“A fish would be even better off,” grumbled Harold. “I never saw such weather.”

“Stop growling,” observed the third member of the party. “We can’t help the rain. Have some tea.”

The latest speaker was Lieutenant George Carter, a young man slightly older than Harold. He was rather short, but exceedingly stocky; his shoulders were broad, his chest deep, and he was possessed of unusual physical strength. He had jet black eyes and his head was covered with short-cropped curly hair. He had physical strength and physical courage as well; in fact it was whispered about in his regiment that he was afraid of nothing on the face of the earth. Assigned to the same regiment and company as Harold, the two young lieutenants had become fast friends.

Captain Norris was somewhat older than his two young aids. He was a graduate of West Point, a man whose opinions and ability were always respected by his fellow soldiers. He was tall, measuring nearly six feet three in height, but he was built proportionately. He was strong

as a young bull, straight as an arrow, and tipped the scales at almost two hundred pounds; in his uniform he looked the ideal soldier. He wore a short, bushy mustache, his hair was decidedly blond, and as may be imagined his appearance was striking in the extreme.

"That's right," exclaimed Captain Norris. "Have some tea; it'll make you feel better."

"It's a bad night," said Harold, drawing up a box which did duty as a chair.

"Right," observed Lieutenant Carter shortly. He was fond of using short, snappy sentences.

"Everything O. K. up above?" inquired the captain.

"As quiet as can be, sir," replied Harold.

"Too wet for old Fritz to come out to-night," said George Carter.

"I hope so," said Harold. "Our men are uncomfortable enough as it is, without getting them up to slip and slide around in the mud."

"Don't be so sure that the Germans are quiet," said Captain Norris. "It may be that they are planning some sort of a surprise party for us."

"Well, they'll be the ones to get the surprise," said Harold grimly. "The men are so mad at the weather that they'd like to take it out on some-

THE ARTILLERY SPEAKS

body. Heaven help any German who shows up within range to-night."

"We owe them something," said Lieutenant Carter.

"For that raid, you mean?" asked the captain.

"Exactly."

"That was our first trip out here," said Captain Norris, "and we were a little green. Next time they try to get funny they'll find us ready."

Suddenly there was a violent thud which seemed to be directly on top of the dugout. The three men stopped talking and looked at one another inquiringly, their tea cups held in their right hands.

"Close one," said Carter, and then he took another sip of tea.

A corporal entered the underground room and saluted.

"What is it, Boyle?" asked Captain Norris.

"The Dutchies are getting busy, sir," announced Boyle, who had a strong suggestion of a brogue in his voice. "They're beginning to pepper us up above."

Another explosion followed, this time a little farther away. Then a series of crashes came in quick succession. Captain Norris sprang to the

BOB COOK'S BROTHER IN TRENCHES

telephone on the wall of the dugout; a moment later he had sent a message to artillery headquarters, and soon the answering roar of the American artillery could be dimly heard.

"Stay by the telephone, Carter," he ordered. "We'll go up and investigate this."

He quickly slipped on his raincoat, put on his metal helmet, and started out. Harold followed, and with Corporal Boyle, hurried after the captain.

The rain had ceased, but the cold wind smote their faces, and the mud was still very much in evidence. Weather conditions were ignored now, however. Crouching low behind the parapet Captain Norris and Harold approached a sentry.

"What's up?" inquired Captain Norris.

"Don't know, sir," replied the sentry. "They seem to be mad about something, but I can't see a sign of them."

At that moment a mud-bespattered Yankee private slid over the parapet and fell into the trench. He scrambled to his feet and almost bumped into Captain Norris. He was a member of one of the patrols which nightly were sent out into No Man's Land to do scout duty and bring back any news of the enemy.

“Well?” demanded the captain.

The man recognized the great bulk of his captain at once. He saluted quickly and still panting from his quick trip, delivered his message.

“They’re gathering for an attack, sir,” he puffed. “We was right up close to their barbed wire and could see ’em. There must be at least a battalion of ’em.”

“Tell that to Lieutenant Carter,” Captain Norris ordered Boyle shortly. “Lieutenant Cook, get your men ready.”

Boyle sprang for the entrance of the dugout and Harold hastened to carry out his captain’s instructions. There was no confusion in the trench, and no one seemed particularly excited. A spirit of grim determination was everywhere in evidence, and as a matter of fact the men seemed eager for the encounter. Every man knew what he was expected to do, and prepared to do it. That was all.

Shells were dropping all around and all but the lookouts retired to the dugouts. The Germans were trying to batter down the American trenches, and cut the protecting wire entanglements in front of them so that their men could get through. They also laid a wall of bursting shells behind

this particular section of the line to prevent the Americans from bringing up reënforcements. Luckily, owing to the mud, the enemy shells buried themselves deep in the earth before exploding, so that the damage they did was not as great as it would have been had the ground been dry.

Meanwhile the American gunners were not idle. They gave the Germans shell for shell and a few extra for good measure. The great metal messengers of death went screaming overhead in a continuous procession, bearing the answer of the free American citizens to the Germans' boast that they were entitled to rule the world.

Every few moments a sentry stuck his head into the dugout where Harold and his men were waiting, to give them word of any new developments. From the American trench a steady stream of star shells was sent out over No Man's Land to light up that forlorn district, and disclose the approach of the enemy.

In the dugouts the men sat around quietly, but grimly waiting. Every soldier examined his rifle, made sure that his ammunition was in place, and thoughtfully ran his finger along the razor-like edge of his bayonet. The bombers held their supply of hand-grenades ready for instant use, while

the machine gunners made a last inspection of their weapons. It was seldom that any one spoke.

Overhead and on all sides the shells roared and crashed. Word came down that one of the sentries had been killed, and Harold ordered another man up to take his place, while he dispatched a squad of men to make what repairs they could to the damaged section of the trench.

“The sons-o’-guns!” muttered Boyle. “We’ll fix ’em!”

The bombardment increased in intensity. The noise of the bursting shells made an almost continuous roar and the ground fairly shook under the incessant pounding of the projectiles. Harold looked around at his men; not one of them showed the least sign of fear; rather it was eagerness to have the fight commence which manifested itself upon the countenances of the American soldiers. They wanted to get out and engage the Huns hand to hand, not sit in an underground room and wait, like rabbits in a burrow.

Harold noted the men’s expressions and he smiled proudly. He knew that whatever happened, they could be relied upon to give a good account of themselves, and there was not one of them who could not be trusted in almost every emergency.

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These Yankee boys had crossed the ocean to fight Germans, they were determined that the world should be kept free, and now that the time had come to show their mettle, they were not going to fail.

For fifteen minutes the bombardment continued. Then as suddenly as it had commenced, it ceased. Immediately a sentry poked his nose into the entrance to the dugout.

“Here they come!” he cried.

CHAPTER II

IN THE DARK

HAROLD at once ordered his men out in the dugout. Every soldier sprang to his post, for they all knew exactly what to do, and there was no confusion of any kind. Star shells, sent up from the American trenches, lighted up No Man's Land, and under the ghastly glare of the rockets a line of German infantry could be seen approaching. The German artillery now started in again, and a wall of bursting shells was laid down in front of the attacking troops; behind this wall of steel and fire the gray-clad Germans came on.

Another line of German shells was falling behind the American trench, cutting off any hope of reënforcements, and preventing any withdrawal, should such a thing seem necessary. The German projectiles also had torn great gaps in the barbed-wire entanglements in

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front of the American trenches; through these gaps the Germans hoped to send their men. The trenches too had been battered severely; some of the sand bags had been blown away entirely, and certain sections of the defenses had been almost entirely destroyed.

But the Americans were ready and prepared to meet their foes. Machine guns had been quickly set in place and soon their sharp rat-a-tat-tat mingled with the noise of the cannon. The American artillery, too, was exceedingly busy. As Harold peered over the parapet he saw a star shell burst directly over the heads of a squad of oncoming Germans; at almost the same instant a shell exploded in the midst of the attacking enemy, and a gap appeared in their lines. For a moment they faltered, then their lines filled up again and on they came.

The American soldiers were almost beside themselves in their excitement. They wanted to jump out of their positions and meet the Germans in the open. Harold somehow expected such an order to be given and he glanced along the trench to the spot where the great bulk of Captain Norris was dimly visible in the darkness. The captain was crouching behind a machine-gun emplace-

ment, as calm as if he was a spectator at a football game.

A shrapnel shell burst on the trench, and two men went down. One of the flying pieces of metal struck Harold's steel helmet a glancing blow, nearly knocking him off his feet.

Corporal Boyle, who was standing alongside, caught him before he could fall, however. "Are you hurt?" he demanded anxiously. He seemed to feel that he had a special mission to look out for his young lieutenant.

"Not a bit," said Harold readily. "It didn't hit me squarely."

"An' they better not," muttered Boyle fiercely. "Sure you're all right?"

"A bit groggy," said Harold. "I'll be over it in a minute."

Just then Captain Norris came along the trench. "We're going out to meet them in a minute," he announced. "Have your men ready." He passed on.

Harold's dizziness, caused by the blow he had received on his head, soon disappeared and he gave the necessary instructions to the men under his command. The news that they were not to wait for the Germans to come all the way to their

positions was greeted with enthusiasm. Boyle in particular was greatly pleased.

"Let us at 'em!" he cried. "We'll show the divils."

The Germans were now within easy rifle range, and the American marksmen were busy. The machine guns, sounding like steel riveting machines, were also becoming more and more active; they sprayed the approaching German infantry with a steady hail of bullets.

Suddenly Captain Norris gave the order, and with a cheer the Americans sprang from their trenches, and at double quick hurried out into No Man's Land to meet the foe. They poured through the openings in the barbed wire, which the German shells had made, and presently found themselves in the comparatively open spaces beyond. Shell holes pitted the surface of the ground; many of them were filled with water from the recent rains, and everywhere the mud was present.

The men slipped and floundered about, and more than one unfortunate plunged waist-deep into some water-filled shell-crater. But on they went, cheering and shouting. In a very short time they had come to grips with their enemies. Bayonets flashed wickedly, and many a shining steel

blade became dyed with red. The grenade throwers hurled their bombs wherever they saw a knot of Germans collected, men fought with knives, the butts of their guns, and sometimes with bare hands.

It was a weird and terrible scene. Harold was here, there and everywhere, cheering and encouraging his men. He had emptied several clips from his revolver and had reason to expect that his bullets had taken effect. And by his side fought Boyle.

A big German made a rush at Harold. Cursing and gibbering, he stumbled forward, his bayonet fixed and ready to run the young officer through. In the excitement and confusion of the struggle Harold had not seen the man; in fact his back was towards him. Boyle, too, had not seen him at first, and had only turned around in time to discover the huge Boche almost upon them. He uttered a warning cry and Harold jumped.

On account of the treacherous footing, however, he slipped and fell. With an exulting shout the German leaped forward. But he had not reckoned with Boyle, who had been ignored by the German in his eagerness to account for the young lieutenant.

"Take that!" shouted Boyle at the top of his lungs, and he lunged forward savagely with his bayonet. He took the German from the side, and before the big Hun could stop or wheel to protect himself, the sharp blade had found its mark. With a hoarse grunt the German stumbled forward, sagged to his knees, and then sprawled on his face. Harold, who had been struggling to his feet, was knocked down by the great bulk of his enemy, and presently found himself pinned to the ground under the body of the German.

"The son-uv-a-gun," cried Boyle angrily.

He was mad for two reasons, first because he had been unable to withdraw his bayonet in time to prevent its being broken off when the German fell, and secondly because the German in falling had sprawled on top of Harold.

"Lay still, Lieutenant," he called. "I'll get him off ye."

He seized the German by his left arm, and with a great effort rolled him over. Then he extended his hand to Harold and assisted him to his feet.

"Are you hurt?" he exclaimed.

Harold was wiping mud and blood from his face. "No," he said shortly.

"That Dutchman nearly got you."

"I know it," said Harold. "Is he dead?"

"I fixed that," said Boyle. "The beggar broke me bayonet though."

"Take his," said Harold.

In falling, the German's gun, with bayonet affixed, had slipped from his grasp, and now lay neglected on the ground. Boyle sprang to pick it up.

Some one was quicker than he, however. As Boyle started forward some other American appeared out of the dark and snatched up the abandoned rifle.

"Give me that!" shouted Boyle. "That's mine."

He suddenly recognized the man who had taken the gun as Lieutenant George Carter.

"Beg pardon, sir," he exclaimed quickly. "I thought it was one of the men."

"Give me your gun!" ordered Carter.

"But the bayonet's gone, sir," Boyle protested.

"I don't care. I'll swap with you. Be quick!"

Under the circumstances there was nothing for Corporal Thomas Boyle to do but to hand over his rifle, though he could not understand why the lieutenant should prefer a gun which had no bayo-

net. He exchanged rifles, however, and then turned to look for Harold.

The men were fighting in little groups. On all sides were Germans and Americans engaged in mortal combat. It has often been said that Germans do not like the look of cold steel, and whether this be true or not, it was certain that the struggle was going against them. The Yankees fought like terriers, all shouting, slashing, and clubbing, and the bodies of many Germans lay strewn about, bodies which had a short time before been men. Nor had the Americans escaped unscathed. They saw that the fight was going in their favor, however, and they pressed forward with new vigor. They knew that the right was on their side and that feeling is a great help to any fighter.

In some places the Germans seemed to be giving way. Between the scene of the struggle and the American trenches the Germans had laid a barrage fire (a wall of exploding shells) to prevent help from coming up; similarly the American gunners laid up a barrage fire in front of the German trenches. The result was that the opposing hordes were out in No Man's Land, cut off on both sides. It looked like a fight to the finish.

CHAPTER III

A PRISONER

HAROLD placed another clip in his revolver, and fired point-blank at a big German who was about to run his bayonet through the body of one of the wounded Americans. Down went the German, sprawling headlong in the mud. Boyle, equipped with the German rifle he had received from Lieutenant George Carter, darted into the midst of a group of fighters and began stabbing right and left. The struggle grew more and more desperate. The Americans fought like men possessed and presently the Germans began to waver.

Suddenly a man sprang forward, brandishing a rifle around his head. He held it by the end of the barrel, and swung it like a club. It was George Carter.

“Follow me,” he shouted.

“To Berlin if you ask us,” Harold heard a big private exclaim, as he hastened after the young

lieutenant. With a hoarse cheer the men charged.

In the forefront was George Carter. He swung Boyle's old rifle like a flail, and catching up with a squad of fleeing Germans he began to lay about him. On account of his great strength the rifle seemed light in his grasp, and he whirled it about as easily as a baseball player would his bat. Using the clubbed end, he brought it down squarely upon the head of one of his enemies; there was a dull thud and the German collapsed like a punctured balloon. The other Americans, encouraged by this success, went at their foes like demons.

But the Germans had had enough.

"Kamerad! Kamerad!" they cried eagerly, throwing away their weapons and holding up their hands. At least fifteen of them surrendered on the spot, and were quickly taken in charge by the American infantrymen.

"Get the rest of them!" shouted Harold, but the Germans had gone. Every one of them who was able to run had made for his own lines at top speed. The Americans rounded up several of them, cutting off their escape wherever possible, and sending bullets whistling after them when no chance of capturing them remained.

The barrage fire cut down many of the fleeing

Germans, but they feared the cold steel of the American bayonets more than they did shell fire, and they continued their mad flight, until it became useless to pursue them farther. The Americans turned back and began to round up their prisoners. Nineteen in all had been captured, and they were soon on their way to the American trenches.

“I said we’d fix ’em,” exclaimed Boyle to one of his friends, Corporal Howard Beam.

Thomas Boyle was a freckle-faced, sandy-haired boy of eighteen, who had volunteered at the outbreak of the war. He loved fighting and he hated all Germans, an ideal combination in these times. He was a strong, thickset youth, with an endless supply of cheerfulness and quick wit. He seemed always to be good-natured except when the word Germans was mentioned; then he swung to the other extreme and almost foamed at the mouth with rage. He adored Harold, and seemed to consider himself the young lieutenant’s special guardian and protector, and if he thought it would be of any advantage to the youthful officer he would gladly have sacrificed his life for him.

Howard Beam had grown up on a farm. His movements were slow, and his mind did not work

very quickly. He was a "plugger," however, and could always be depended upon for any task, great or small. He was tall, had dark hair and brown eyes, and enormous feet and hands. Corporal Boyle liked practical jokes and delighted in witticisms at other people's expense, and the particular mark for his activities was Howard Beam. He teased him sometimes until the big corporal was almost ready to commit murder, but despite all this the two were fast friends. Howard seemed to forgive the artful Thomas entirely, between teasing periods.

"We did fix 'em, too," said Howard Beam in reply to Boyle's remark.

"I thought I saw you running away there once," said Thomas slyly.

"What's that?" demanded Beam, falling easily into the trap. "I run away?"

"That's what some one told me."

"You lie!" cried poor Howard angrily. "You'll live to be a thousand years old before you ever see me run away from any greasy German pig."

"It's queer how those things get around," mused Thomas. "I hope for your sake the captain doesn't hear of what you did. You can trust me not to say anything about it."

"But I didn't run, I tell you," shouted the big corporal, now almost beside himself with rage.

"Who told you that anyway?"

"I forget who it was."

"What did he say?"

"He said you started to run but your feet were so big they got stuck in the mud, and you had to stop. Tell the truth, now, is that so?"

For the first time Beam suspected that his comrade was not serious. He turned and looked at Boyle narrowly, but in the darkness could not see the expression on his face.

"You little red-headed shrimp," he grumbled.

"Don't you believe me?" demanded Thomas in an injured voice.

Howard Beam was still not quite sure whether his friend was serious or not. He believed, however, that Boyle was fooling, and while he forgave him, his anger at being accused of running away had not yet cooled, even though he knew his bantering was not true. He spied one of the German prisoners in the file ahead lagging behind the others, and in him recognized a means of smoothing his ruffled feelings.

"Get up there, you beggar," he cried, and

pricked the German gently in the seat of his trousers with the tip of his bayonet.

"Yah!" cried the German suddenly, as he clapped his hand over the injured spot. He sprang forward and fell to the ground.

"What are ye doin' there?" demanded Boyle angrily of Beam.

"I hardly touched him," said Beam stoutly. "I couldn't have hurt him. He's bluffing."

"If he is, we'll soon find out," cried Thomas, as he and Howard leaned over the German, who was now lying face downward in the mud.

"Roll over and give us a look at you," he ordered.

The German made no move.

"Roll over," repeated Thomas.

"He can't understand English probably," suggested Beam.

"I never thought o' that," said Boyle sheepishly.

"What's going on here?" demanded a voice, and Harold appeared on the scene.

Boyle and Beam both saluted.

"This here Hun," said Boyle, "is lying on his face and won't move."

"How did he get there?" asked Harold.

"Beam here gave him a prick in the seat of his breeches with his bayonet," Boyle explained. "He gives a yowl and falls down in the mud."

"You must have stuck him pretty hard, Beam," said Harold sharply. "You shouldn't do that."

"I hardly touched him, sir," said Beam. "I'm sure he's faking."

Harold produced a pocket flash and turned it on the prostrate body of the prisoner.

"You can see for yourself, sir," exclaimed Beam eagerly. "His breeches ain't even tore where I touched him. He's a fake, I tell ye, sir."

"He may be wounded somewhere," said Harold. "We'd better roll him over."

Boyle grasped the German by his arm and tried to turn him over on his back. The German resisted stoutly, however, and Boyle exerted more strength but with no result. He straightened up and looked at Harold.

"He's not wounded, Lieutenant," he said. "At any rate a man who has that much strength left can't be hurted very bad."

"You help Boyle," Harold ordered Beam, and together the two soldiers tried to turn their prisoner over, but in vain. He hugged the ground like a drowning man clinging to a straw.

"It's no use, sir," panted Boyle at last. "I guess he's there for good."

"We'll all get hold of him," exclaimed Harold. "Come on now, all together."

The three young soldiers took hold of the prisoner's left arm and leg, and exerting all their strength finally succeeded in turning him over on his back. Boyle immediately placed himself astride the German's chest and held him down. The prisoner fought desperately, however, and after much effort he got his two hands over his throat and held them there.

"Anyting but dot," he muttered.

"Ah, you do speak English, don't you?" panted Boyle.

"Anyting but dot," repeated the German.

"Anything but what?" demanded Harold.

"Do not cut mine t'roat," begged the frightened prisoner.

"Well f'r heaven's sake!" exclaimed Boyle in astonishment. "So that's what's botherin' ye, is it? Who said we were going to cut your throat?"

"The Amerigans, dey always do dot," said the German, still keeping his hands tightly clenched over his palate.

"Who said so?" asked Harold.

“Mine officers. Dey tell us dot.” He shivered with fear.

“Get up,” ordered Harold. “Your officers lie. We’re not going to hurt you.”

The German was not easily convinced, however, and it took a deal of arguing on the part of his captors to make him understand that they had no designs upon his life. He gradually realized that they were telling him the truth, however, and at length he arose from the ground and continued his journey towards the American trenches.

“Did you ever hear of anything to beat that?” exclaimed Boyle, as they followed on behind.

“I never did,” Harold agreed.

“No wonder they fight hard,” said Boyle. “The poor idiots believe everything that’s told them, and if I thought I was going to get my throat cut if I was captured I guess I’d fight hard too.”

“If you ever got captured by the Germans you’d stand a better chance of having your throat cut than this fellow has,” said Howard Beam solemnly.

“That’s true enough,” said Harold.

Presently they came to the American trenches and turned their prisoners over to the squad which

had charge of the other captives. A squad was just leaving to escort them to the rear, while the American soldiers got together to talk over their recent experience.

"They'll think twice before they try to pull off another stunt like that," exclaimed Boyle.

"Yes," agreed Burnett, a big Texan, "but they did some damage to us too."

"How many men did we lose?"

"Well," said Burnett, "DeHart, Pierson and Nolan were killed, Lovejoy, Hall, Davison, Anderson, and Dane are wounded and there are several fellows missing."

"Too bad," said Boyle soberly. "I suppose it's all part of the game though, and at any rate, we're better off than the Huns who lost nineteen men in prisoners alone."

"I wish it was nineteen hundred," growled Howard Beam.

"You're never satisfied," exclaimed Thomas. "If some one offered you Europe, I suppose you'd be mad because you couldn't have the earth."

The men were seated in a dugout, cleaning their rifles, and recovering from the effects of the fray. They were a tired lot, but not too tired to go through the same thing again, if it should be neces-

sary. Their confidence also was greatly increased, and every man felt that when it came to a test he was the superior of any German alive.

"Some day," said Beam gravely, "I'm going to take you by the back of the neck, and throw you clean across No Man's Land into the German trenches. That's where you belong, and it's too bad some one of them didn't take you back a few minutes ago."

"You can't do it," jeered Thomas.

"Why can't I?"

"Because you're not man enough, that's why."

"I'll prove it to you," exclaimed Beam, pretending to be very fierce.

"You can't throw me *clean* across anyway."

"I'll show you I can if you're not careful."

"Oh, no," laughed Boyle. "You can't throw me *clean* across, because I'm not clean. No one who lives in these trenches very long is going to be anything but dirty."

"You're a smart fellow," said Beam sarcastically. "I wish you were a German, and then I could shoot you without being hanged for murder."

"Well if the Germans were all like me, and the Americans were all like you, this war would soon

be over, and Germany would own the world," laughed Thomas derisively.

Beam made a grab for his tormentor, but Boyle dodged and slipped away out of reach. He was no match for Beam in strength and really feared the powerful grip of the big corporal. The soldiers seated about the dugout enjoyed these verbal bouts between the two friends and always urged them on.

"Catch him, Beam," cried Burnett gleefully. "Let's see what you can do to him."

Thomas slid in behind a row of soldiers and from his comparatively safe position defied Beam to catch him. "Your feet are too big," he taunted. "You're built like a tank."

"Don't let him say that to you," exclaimed Burnett. "I wouldn't let any one say that to me."

Howard Beam lumbered about the room, clumsily trying to seize his smaller and more agile opponent. Boxes were overturned in the chase and once the stove was nearly upset. Finally Howard cornered Boyle, however, and advanced upon him warily with both big hands outstretched.

"Now, brick-top," he growled. "I've got you."

What Boyle's fate might have been in the hands of the good-natured giant is unknown, but at that

moment Lieutenant Harold Cook appeared in the dugout. Immediately the "combat" ended.

"I want volunteers," announced Harold. "We're going out to look for some of our poor fellows who are missing. Who wants to go?"

CHAPTER IV

ON PATROL

STRAIGHTWAY a clamor arose in the dug-out. Every man present wanted to be included in the scouting party, and they voiced their desires loudly.

“I want only ten men,” smiled Harold.

“Take me! Take me!” shouted every one at once, surging forward eagerly.

“I’ve got to go,” exclaimed Burnett. “Bob Walsh, one of my best friends is missing.”

“All right, Burnett,” said Harold. “I’ll take you.”

The insistence of the remainder of the men became greater. All tried to talk at the same time, every one shouting some particular reason why he should be selected.

“That’ll do,” said Harold finally, and silence reigned.

“You come, Boyle,” he said, “and get eight others. Be ready in five minutes.”

Harold left the dugout, and Boyle took charge of matters. He mounted a box and looked disdainfully at the eager faces about him.

"You're a pretty bum crowd," he sighed at length, pretending to be greatly discouraged by his inspection.

"I'm going, anyway!" exclaimed Beam.

"Is that so?" demanded Thomas in a high voice. "Your feet are too big to get out of the trenches."

"I'm going anyway," Beam repeated solemnly.

"Of course ye are," said Boyle. "Because I order ye to."

Howard grinned delightedly, and stood aside while Thomas selected seven others. He chose them rapidly, picking men from various sections of the group. The little band was soon made up, and carefully began to prepare for their expedition. Grim determination had taken the place of noise, and in silence they filed out of the dugout when Harold summoned them a few moments later.

The artillery was almost quiet now; only an occasional shell was fired by the opposing guns, and compared with the tumult which had taken place earlier in the night this section of the front seemed almost still. Silence did not mean that the enemy

would not be alert, however, and in all probability he would be on the watch for some such party as this.

The little band of Americans stealthily clambered out of the trenches, and with Harold in the lead made their way through the barbed-wire entanglements. Already soldiers were at work repairing the damage done to the wire by the German shells; when morning dawned the trenches and the wire would be as good as ever, and appearances would never show that a fight had taken place the preceding night.

Harold spread out his party, and side by side, with every man some thirty feet distant from his nearest neighbor, they advanced. Their progress was slow, for the mud presented many difficulties, shell-holes had to be avoided, and the necessity for absolute silence was imperative. Keeping a sharp lookout in all directions they pushed forward; the German trenches in this section were nearly a half-mile distant, but enemy patrols were always active at night, and there was a good chance that the Americans might encounter a squad of Germans out on a similar mission themselves. Harold's men were not likely to be taken by surprise, however.

In the center of No Man's Land was a little village. At least it had been a village once, or rather a group of houses, but now it was a heap of ruins, only a few stone walks remaining. Ever since the opposing forces had taken up their present positions, the little hamlet had been a target for the guns of both sides and they had pounded it incessantly; only piles of loose stones and mortar remained of what once had been solid houses. It was towards this hamlet that Harold led his little party, and here it was that earlier in the night the struggle already recounted had taken place.

Nothing occurred to hinder their progress and presently they reached their destination. Harold collected his patrol about him, and gave instructions that the premises be searched for signs of the missing American soldiers. The party at once scattered while Harold stood watch. Faint streaks of light were stretching their long fingers across the eastern sky, and it would not be safe for the patrol to stay away from their trenches much longer. If the Germans saw them in the ruined hamlet they could cut off their retreat, and it would then be necessary for the Americans to pass the day in the ruins, and take their chances

of getting back the following night, if indeed any of them remained alive.

Harold was considering these matters when two of his men came up, bearing a stretcher.

"Here's what's left of Bob Walsh," said one of the men, who proved to be Burnett, the big Texan.

"Is he dead?" asked Harold soberly.

"As a door nail," replied Burnett. "Wait till I get another crack at those Huns."

The big fellow was all broken up over the death of his friend; tears streamed down his face, but he had an expression about his eyes and mouth, however, which boded ill for his enemies. When a strong man weeps he is usually dangerous.

"Too bad," said Harold. "We'll give him a decent funeral anyway."

"We will that," Burnett agreed heartily. "Can I get some flowers around here?"

"I think you can," Harold assured him.

Meanwhile the other men were beginning to report. They had found four of their comrades; two of them dead, and the others badly wounded. One of them had his leg crushed below the knee and the most casual glance was sufficient to convince the observer that the lower part of the limb

would have to be amputated. The wounded man, named Peters, knew this too, but after lying on the ground for two hours among the ruins, unable to move, he was perfectly happy now that his own men had rescued him. His one fear had been that he would fall into the hands of the enemy.

Two of the missing men could not be found and it was deemed likely that they had been captured. At any rate it was time to return.

"Every one here?" asked Harold.

"All except Corporal Boyle, sir," said Howard Beam.

"Any one seen Corporal Boyle?" Harold inquired.

No one knew anything about him.

"You stay with me, Beam," said Harold.

"Every one else go on back as quickly as you can go."

The seven soldiers started for their trenches, carrying their dead and wounded with them. Harold and Howard Beam began a tour of the ruined hamlet to look for Boyle.

"I don't see what could have happened to him," said Beam anxiously. "There's been no firing."

"He may have fallen down," Harold suggested.

"The walking is treacherous around here."

"Well I certainly hope he's all right," said Beam. "I don't know what I'd do without the little red-headed nuisance, mad as he makes me sometimes."

"We'd all miss him badly," agreed Harold.

"His teasing me is just as much a part of my day as breakfast," Beam confessed. "I dread it sometimes, but I'd miss it terribly."

"Oh, he's probably all——"

A sudden noise cut Harold's sentence short. He seized Beam by his sleeve and pulled him back under the lee of a ruined wall. Crouched low at its base the two young soldiers waited in silence.

The noise which had alarmed and startled them so, was as if a plank had fallen down on the pile of loose bricks and mortar all about, and how could it have fallen unless some one had dislodged it? The sound had come from a spot not over fifty feet distant apparently, but it was around the corner of the wall and both Harold and his companion preferred to await developments before investigating. But they had not long to wait.

A muffled exclamation of anger came to their ears, and then the sound of a voice which they both knew well.

"The son-of-a-gun," it said.

“That’s Tom,” whispered Beam delightedly.
“What do you suppose he’s up to?”

“We’ll soon see,” exclaimed Harold, as he started in the direction of the voice.

As he and his companion rounded the corner of the wall they spied a dark shape picking itself up from the ground. It muttered and grumbled and presently picked up a piece of stone and began to scrape its arms with it. Harold and Beam were greatly mystified.

“Boyle!” called Harold softly.

“Yes, sir,” said the shape quickly, for it was none other than the missing corporal.

“What are you doing?”

“I was doing a painting job, sir, but I fell.”

“What do you mean? Do you know that we’ve been looking all over for you?”

“No, sir,” said Boyle. “I didn’t know that.”

“What have you been doing here?”

Boyle still scraped his arms vigorously, though in the dim light it was not possible to see the reason for this strange proceeding. There was a strong odor of pitch in the air.

“This building here must have been a restaurant once, sir,” said Boyle, starting to explain.

"As I was scouting around I stumbled on it, and thought I'd change its name."

Harold was curious now, and in spite of the fact that it would soon be light, he wished to know what it was Boyle had meant. He and Beam drew near.

"There it is, you see," said Thomas, pointing to a ruined doorway.

Over the top of the door had been scrawled in big black letters "HINDENBURG RATHSKELLER."

"I found a barrel of pitch here," continued Boyle, "and as you can see I drew a line through that name and put a good American one in its place."

Harold peered closely and saw written under the former name the words, "CHILDS RESTAURANT."

"You put that on with pitch!" he exclaimed, smiling in spite of himself.

"Yes, sir," said Boyle, "and just as I finished I slipped and nearly fell in the pitch barrel. Both of me arms is covered with it."

"Serves you right," Beam muttered.

"I couldn't let the Huns name this place, and

get away with it, could I?" Boyle appealed to Harold.

"No, I suppose not," laughed Harold.

"I wish I could get this pitch off me arms."

"Well I guess you'll have to wait until we get back," said Harold. "It'll soon be light though and unless we get started at once we may not get there at all."

Without further delay they set out on their return journey. The sun would soon be up, but the early morning mists covered the ground, furnishing a cloak to hide the movements of the three young Americans. The mists, however, made their walking difficult for while they hid the three soldiers, the dangerous shell-holes and craters also were well covered from sight.

Boyle still chuckled over his painting work, and in spite of the pitch with which his arms were smeared he was well satisfied with what he had done.

"What do you suppose the old Huns will say when they see that?" he exclaimed.

"They'll be mad, I guess," suggested Beam.

"I hope so," said Thomas gleefully. "It means though that I'll have to go out there again to-

morrow night and see if any one has been monkeying with my painting."

"You might meet old Hindenburg himself out there," said Beam.

"I wish I could," exclaimed Thomas eagerly. "He can't scare me with his bulldog face and blacking-brush hair. I'd like to have about three minutes alone with the old bird."

"You're ambitious, Boyle," laughed Harold. "I don't suppose you'd mind meeting the Kaiser either."

"The old——" began Thomas, but before he could finish his statement, his foot slipped in the treacherous mud, he lost his balance, and a moment later disappeared from the astonished gaze of his two companions.

CHAPTER V

AN ODD OCCURRENCE

DON'T move, Beam," warned Harold. "You may follow Boyle if you do."

"Where did he go?" demanded Howard in astonishment.

"Into a shell-crater," said Harold. "It's just ahead there, all covered over with fog."

The sound of Boyle's voice now came to their ears and his remarks about mists and shell-holes were, to say the least, uncomplimentary.

"Are you hurt?" inquired Beam.

"No," came the reply in a disgusted tone. "I'm awful mad though."

"Why didn't you look where you were going?"

"How can a fellow 'look' when he can't 'see'?" demanded Boyle angrily.

"Can you get out?" asked Harold.

"I think so, sir," said Boyle. "It's awful muddy and slippery on the sides though, and me eyes is full of mud."

"How deep is the hole? We can't see a thing from here."

"Not deep, I think. Here I come out."

In the fog, almost at Harold's and Beam's feet, were presently heard the sounds of puffing and grunting. Boyle was trying to climb out of the shell crater, but it was hard work. Suddenly a shape appeared dimly through the mists as Boyle struggled and toiled to get out of the hole. His footing was most uncertain, however, and it was necessary for him, in order to make any progress at all, to crawl on his hands and knees.

"Give me your hand," cried Beam. "I'll pull you out."

He leaned as far forward as he dared, and extended his right hand to his friend. Boyle raised himself up quickly, and made a grab at Beam's hand. He caught hold of it, but having let go the grip which he had with his hands, his footing became more precarious than ever; his feet flew out from under him, and he fell. He did not let go of Beam's hand, however, and the consequence was that as he slipped backwards, Beam was jerked violently forward. Howard tried desperately to save himself, but his efforts were of no avail. He fell forward on his face, and a moment

later the two unfortunate young soldiers plunged headlong together to the bottom of the shell crater.

Harold, left standing above, would have been unable to keep from laughing at this mishap, had it not been for the grave danger of the situation. At any moment the mists might lift, and they would be left stranded in No Man's Land, and would then very probably be obliged to pass the day in the muddy shell-hole.

"What's the matter with you two?" he demanded angrily.

"He pulled me in," said Beam, his voice coming out of the fog.

"Me foot slipped," countered Boyle.

"I believe you did it on purpose," said Beam wrathfully.

"I did not," shouted Boyle. "Do you think I'm crazy to stay in here?"

"Stop your arguing," ordered Harold. "How are you going to get out?"

"We'll have to try to climb, I guess," said Beam dolefully.

"Wait a minute," said Harold. "Stay where you are and I'll get you out."

He remembered having stumbled over the dead branch of a tree a moment before, and he turned

to retrace his steps in search of it now. Presently he found it, and picking it up retraced his steps towards the shell-hole which was occupied by the two hapless corporals. It was difficult to find his way about in the fog, however, and had it not been for the sound of the voices of the two men wrangling in the crater he might not have found them so easily.

"Don't talk so much down there," he ordered. "Do you want the Germans to hear you?"

Immediate silence ensued.

"Here's a dead branch I found," he continued. "I'll hold on to this end and one of you take the other."

He extended the branch down into the shell-hole, and with its aid presently hauled Beam out. A moment later Thomas Boyle also stood beside them.

"Now," said Harold, "we can go on, and be careful where you step."

Carefully they continued their journey and in a few moments returned to the American trench. As they entered the fortified ditch the fog lifted and the sun shone brightly.

"Just in time," exclaimed Boyle, and then

glancing at his friend Howard he burst out laughing.

“You’re the funniest looking thing I ever saw,” he cried delightedly. “Where’d you get all the mud?”

“I’d like to bet I haven’t got half as much on me as you have,” retorted Beam.

“Well we’d better borrow a couple of hoes and shovels and get some of it off,” laughed Thomas. “This pitch on me hands and arms is no fun either.”

They were about to retire for this purpose when a sudden exclamation from one of the other soldiers in the trench arrested them. Thomas and Howard both stopped; Harold had gone to report to Captain Norris.

“What’s going on out there?” demanded the soldier.

“What are you talking about?” retorted Boyle, turning around.

“Here comes the Kaiser,” continued the soldier gleefully.

“The man’s crazy,” said Boyle sorrowfully to Beam.

“See for yourself,” said the soldier, stepping aside from his peephole in the parapet.

60 BOB COOK'S BROTHER IN TRENCHES

Boyle took his place and gazed out across No Man's Land. A German soldier was walking towards them, alone, and apparently unarmed. He carried no flag of truce and seemed to be in no hurry whatsoever. All along the American trench the soldiers were looking out at him in amazement. What could be his purpose?

"The man's a deserter," was one soldier's opinion.

"His own men would shoot him if he were," said Lieutenant George Carter, who was standing nearby.

"Shall we take a shot at him?" asked another.

"Wait," suggested George.

Nearer and nearer came the German, picking his way carefully over the muddy ground, and gingerly skirting the numerous shell-holes. He was still some five hundred yards distant, about half-way across No Man's Land. The Americans watched him curiously, unable to make out his purpose. Aside from the one man who had spoken no one seemed to have any desire to fire at him, however. They were more interested in seeing what he was going to do.

"It's a queer thing, Howard," said Boyle.

“It is,” Beam agreed. “The fellow’s got his nerve though.”

“Either that or he’s simple minded.”

“Perhaps he’s coming to ask us to dinner,” suggested one wit.

“Or he wants to play pinochle,” said another.

A laugh went up at this, and still the German advanced. He was now not over four hundred yards away but he seemed to be walking more slowly.

“I think I’ll go meet him,” exclaimed Boyle suddenly, and before any one could restrain him he sprang upon the parapet and stood at full height.

Whether it was Boyle’s appearance or not, something evidently startled the German, for he suddenly turned and started to run at full speed in the direction from which he had come. The spell was broken and a volley of shots rang out from the American trench. Still the German kept on, and though bullets struck all about him he was untouched, and at length he reached his own trench and disappeared.

“Well what do you think of that?” demanded Boyle, jumping down off the parapet just in time to escape a bullet which whistled overhead.

"Something scared him off," remarked George Carter.

"Didn't he run, though?" exclaimed Boyle gleefully. "I didn't think a German could move so fast."

"Why shouldn't he run?" said Beam, gingerly scraping the sticky mud off his uniform.

"Why should he?" challenged Boyle.

"He was scared."

"Scared of what? No one had fired at him. Why didn't he keep on coming?"

"Because he saw you."

"But I was unarmed."

"I know that," said Beam dryly. "Still he probably thought you were one of the gorillas escaped from the zoo and he didn't want to take any chances."

"Me eye," muttered Boyle, crestfallen at having fallen into this trap. He had so often made Beam the butt of his own jokes that he was all the more upset at having been caught by the man who was usually his victim.

"Ya, Beam!" shouted Burnett delightedly. "That's the time you got him. I shouldn't be surprised if you were right, too."

A burst of laughter had greeted Howard's re-

mark. Almost every man in the company had at one time or another been the victim of Boyle's "wit," and many of them had old scores which they had been unable to repay. As a result, Beam's victory was enthusiastically welcomed.

For a moment Boyle was completely floored. He merely stood and looked at Beam, grinning sheepishly. He was a good sportsman, however, and held no grudge.

"I'll get you yet," he exclaimed cheerfully, and retired to his dugout.

"He will too, Howard," warned Burnett. "You'd better keep your eyes open."

"I try to keep them open," said Beam. "But his tongue is quicker than my eye."

"It's quicker than most people's eyes," laughed Burnett. "He's a great fellow."

"We couldn't do without him," said Beam soberly.

That afternoon a little procession wended its way out of the American trenches to a green hillside two miles away. Certain members of the party bore stretchers upon which lay figures covered with shrouds. They were on their way to the cemetery.

While the chaplain read the burial service the

men stood around in a circle, their heads bared and their faces very solemn. Presently the rough wooden coffins were lowered into the freshly made graves, the earth was filled in, the bugler blew taps, a volley was fired over the low mounds, and the names of some more brave American boys were added to that illustrious list of others who had died that their country might live.

Wooden crosses were erected over the graves, the name and rank and regiment of each man was inscribed upon the crosses, and then the procession filed back to the trenches. The soil of France is sown thick with these little crosses; in places they stretch in seemingly endless lines, the rows having somewhat the appearance of the marching of the soldiers whose graves they indicate. The bodies of French, English, Scotch, Irish, Russian, Belgian, Italian, Australians, New Zealanders, Canadian, East Indian, black fighters from Africa, Portuguese, and American soldiers lie side by side, an eloquent testimony to the conviction of these splendid men that liberty and justice, not brutality and might, should rule this world.

CHAPTER VI

INTO THE MIST

SEVERAL days later Captain Norris, with his two lieutenants, Cook and Carter, were once more seated in their dugout. A consultation was in progress, and the faces of the three young officers were serious and solemn.

“We must get the information,” said Captain Norris, “and I believe the best way to do is to send about three men. What do you think?”

“That seems correct to me,” said George Carter. “Will you detail three men or ask for volunteers?”

“That’s another point I wanted to talk to you two about,” said the captain. “I expect we can find plenty of volunteers without difficulty.”

“No question of that,” laughed George. “Every man in the company will want to go, and the only trouble is that those not selected will probably feel sore.”

"I have a way out of that," said Harold.

"All right," exclaimed the captain. "Let's have it."

"I will volunteer to go, and will select two men to go with me."

"But I want to go myself," protested George.

"And I spoke first," said Harold.

"Whom would you take with you?" asked Captain Norris of Harold.

"Two of my corporals, Boyle and Beam. There are no better men in the American army."

"I know that," exclaimed the captain readily. "You may lose them some day though."

"How is that?" demanded Harold quickly.

"They may be recommended for commissions and sent away to the officers' school."

"They deserve it," Harold agreed readily. "But I doubt if they would go. Both of them are satisfied where they are, and they have no desire for honors. Also I don't believe they would care to leave their old company and their friends."

"Perhaps not," said Captain Norris. "But to get back to the business in hand. You understand what information we want, I suppose?"

"You want us to get up as close as we can to the German trenches and find out if possible how

thickly they are manned. It will be a regular scouting expedition."

"But a very dangerous one. Do you think you can manage it?"

"Can't I go?" exclaimed George.

"I think I can," said Harold, ignoring his friend's remark.

"All right then," said Captain Norris, also ignoring George. "I shall count on you."

Harold's face showed no particular signs of elation or joy at this trust reposed in him. He knew perfectly well how perilous an expedition lay ahead of him, and it was too serious a matter to be trifled with. At the same time it was flattering to know that his captain had sufficient confidence in him for this task.

George, however, was plainly disappointed, although like a good soldier he tried his utmost to conceal his feelings. The undertaking for which Harold had been chosen would have suited him exactly, for danger and excitement were two things in life that he loved.

"At what time shall we start, sir?" inquired Harold rising to his feet.

"At dawn to-morrow."

"May I find my two men now?"

“By all means,” said Captain Norris. “After you have talked with them though I would suggest that you get some sleep, for you’ll need all your strength and wits.”

“Yes, sir,” said Harold, and after saluting briskly he left the dugout.

He found Boyle and Beam engaged in a heated argument concerning the respective merits of the White Sox and the Giants. As far as they were apparently concerned there might not have been a war going on. Boyle was seated on the firing step of the trench, his rifle between his knees, while he pointed an accusing finger at Howard Beam.

“Why you don’t know what you’re talking about,” he exclaimed warmly. “Eddie Collins with one arm gone could lick the whole New York team.”

“Is that so?” demanded Beam. “Heinie Zim——”

He saw Harold approaching at that moment, and whatever claim he was going to make for the Giants’ famous infielder was cut short by the appearance of the young lieutenant.

“Do you two want to take a trip with me tomorrow morning?” Harold inquired.

“We’ll go to Hades with you if you ask us,” replied Boyle eagerly.

“We don’t want to go there,” said Harold with a smile. “Captain Norris has been ordered to get what information he can about the strength of the Germans in the trenches opposite and I am to see what I can find out for him. I thought perhaps you’d like to go along.”

“That suits us fine,” exclaimed Beam.

“It sure does,” Thomas agreed heartily.

“Well then,” said Harold, “be ready to start at dawn to-morrow. And you’d better get all the sleep you can before then.”

“That suits us too,” grinned Beam.

“No rifles in the morning, remember,” said Harold. “Only grenades and automatics.”

He left the two corporals to continue their baseball discussion if they so desired, and repaired to his dugout where he curled up in his rough wooden bunk and soon was fast asleep. Thomas and Howard had forgotten baseball for the time being, however, and they too were soon sleeping soundly in their underground shelter.

The following morning the three scouts were astir bright and early. They partook of a hot breakfast at the company canteen and were soon

ready to start on their perilous mission. Thick mists hung low over the ground everywhere and it was impossible to see far in any direction. The sun was not yet up and the air was damp and clung to the body like a cloak.

"Is this bloomin' fog never goin' away?" Boyle said peevishly. "I'm getting tired of walking around in cloud banks."

"Stop growling," said Beam. "We can't help the weather and at any rate it is a good thing for us. Besides if it wasn't for the fog your old red head would shine like a searchlight."

Now Thomas was very conscious of the bright color of his hair, and he resented remarks made concerning it. He had no opportunity to argue now, however, for Harold was waiting for them and there was no time to be lost. He merely muttered under his breath in reply to Howard's remark.

"All ready?" said Harold. "Got everything?"

"Yes, sir," replied Thomas and Howard together.

"Come along then," and Harold sprang lightly upon the parapet and began to feel his way cautiously through the belt of barbed wire which stretched in front of the trenches. The two cor-

porals followed close behind, and presently they emerged from the wire entanglements into No Man's Land.

"I wonder if any one's been monkeying with my sign," whispered Thomas.

"What sign?" queried Howard.

"The restaurant sign, of course. Do you suppose we could come home that way and have a look, Lieutenant?"

"We'll be lucky to get home at all," said Harold shortly, and the little party lapsed into silence.

The thick white mist closed in all about them, and it became increasingly difficult for the three scouts to pick their way. Frequent shell holes blocked their path and the ever-present mud was particularly unpleasant that morning. The three soldiers had the appearance of ghosts as they proceeded slowly through the enveloping fog. Presently they stopped to take their bearings and to rest for a moment.

"Not much gun fire now," remarked Thomas after a moment.

"No," said Harold. "It has quieted down a lot, but last night it was active enough."

"It woke me up," said Beam.

"Where?" exclaimed Thomas. "It must have been active." It seemed impossible for him to let a chance for a joke go by.

"It was either guns or your snoring," retorted Howard.

"All right," said Harold. "Let's go on."

They continued on their way, advancing cautiously and picking their footing most carefully. For a considerable distance they went without a word being spoken, and Harold figured they must now be nearly half-way to their destination. The necessity for caution increased, for the risk of meeting an enemy patrol was ever present.

Suddenly Harold, who was in the lead, halted. He shrank back and raised his automatic revolver to the level of his shoulder. He had been carrying his weapon in his right hand, ready to use it at a moment's notice. The two corporals likewise halted and prepared for immediate action.

A shape loomed up ahead of them in the mist. Shadowy and vague, it seemed to the three young scouts to take the form of a Prussian soldier. They could see his helmet, and his arms move. What should they do?

"Will I let him a bomb?" whispered Thomas.

“Ssh,” hissed Harold softly.

Motionless they stood and watched the figure. Was he too looking at them? Perhaps he was one of a company, the other members of which even now were trying to slip around in back of the three young Americans and cut them off.

“Keep watch behind, Beam,” whispered Harold.

He gazed intently at the figure. What was the man trying to do? Why did he not move? If he was alone it seemed folly for him to stand there with three enemies opposing him, for he could easily run away, and the chances were that he would be able to escape in the mist. The whole thing was odd and mysterious.

All at once Boyle snickered. Harold was angered at this, and was about to reprimand his corporal sharply, when the fog lifted for a moment. To his great amazement, he saw that the shadowy form which had so alarmed them was not a man at all, but the shattered stump of a tree. A shell at some time had exploded close by and a once noble tree had been destroyed, leaving only a twisted and torn trunk, about six or seven feet high. A low branch had been left hanging by a single

strand and as this branch swayed to and fro it had the appearance of an arm.

"A stump!" exclaimed Harold disgustedly.
"What's the matter with us?"

"We're nervous, I guess," said Boyle.

"We certainly must be," muttered Harold.
"Come on, Beam."

The three young soldiers approached the stump whose appearance through the fog had so deceived them. Seen at close range it in no way resembled a man, but such is the nature of a fog, that many a man has been deceived by objects more innocent than the one which had so alarmed Harold Cook and his two corporals.

"Well, we didn't get hurt, did we?" smiled Harold, as he tore the hanging branch from the stump, and threw it far into the mist.

"But I was awful scared for a minute," said Thomas soberly.

"I thought the Prussian Guard was after us," muttered Howard.

"Things do look queer in a fog," said Harold, "but we won't get fooled so easily next time and meanwhile we'd better be moving on."

They stole forward stealthily, eyes and ears alert for the slightest sign of the enemy. As they

came nearer to the German trenches the shell-holes increased in size and number, showing that the American artillery had been active, and active recently, for most of the shell holes were newly made. "This is what our guns were doing last night," said Harold softly.

"Would it be a good plan to keep in the shell-holes?" whispered Boyle.

"Perhaps it would," Harold agreed. "You mean jump from one to another?"

"Yes," said Thomas. "We can keep hidden better that way, it seems to me. They're so close together we can scramble right out of one into the next. Walking around them would make us more of a target if we should happen to be seen, and if we have to we might be able to hide in one of these craters for quite a long while."

"A good scheme," agreed Harold. "I think we're getting pretty close too."

They entered the nearest shell-hole, clambered down one side and up the other, and then after a careful look around, swung themselves over into the adjoining crater. In this manner they advanced more slowly, and as Boyle had said, more safely.

The farther they went the more caution the

three young scouts exercised. They felt that they must now be almost up to the hostile trenches and naturally they had no desire to be surprised. Their hearts pounded with excitement though they felt no fear, and were actually enjoying, though perhaps not consciously, the element of danger attached to their exploit. As they were emerging from one big shell-crater, Harold suddenly held up his hand.

"This must be the German first line," he whispered. "But there's no one here."

"Nobody home," murmured Boyle.

A long line of upturned mortar, sandbags, lumber, and all the other elements of a trench stretched out before them. All around the earth was pitted with holes caused by the accurate fire of the American batteries.

"They had to evacuate," said Harold softly. "Keep low there, Beam," he warned.

"Where've they gone?" whispered Boyle.

"Withdrawn to their next line, the support trench, I suppose," said Harold.

"Sha'n't we try to have a look at 'em?"

"I guess we'd better," Harold agreed. "We don't want to go back empty-handed."

They stood for a moment trying to pierce the thick fog with their gaze, but it was only possible to see a few feet in any direction. Presently Harold climbed out of the crater which they had been occupying and crouched low in what remained of the German first line trench. The two corporals followed close at his heels.

Not a trace of the Germans was to be seen. It seemed almost as if they had literally been blown out of their trench, while the trench itself was almost completely demolished. Harold and his two companions inspected about fifty yards of it, or what remained of it, but it was easy to see that the former occupants had withdrawn.

“We’ll go on now,” said Harold in a whisper.

He led the way over the shell-holes which in this locality dotted the earth in greatly increased numbers. The three scouts were more alert now than ever before, for they could not know at what moment they might suddenly come upon the German support trench and find themselves face to face with the enemy. For a time all went well. At the end of about five minutes of this slow progress, however, and as they were climbing up the side of an especially steep crater, Beam dislodged a stone

from its resting-place and it rattled down to the bottom of the shell-hole, making considerable noise in its descent.

Almost instantly a shot rang out through the mist, and a hoarse cry of alarm sounded scarcely twenty yards away.

CHAPTER VII

AGAINST ODDS

THE outlook for the three young Americans seemed very dark at that moment. They were far away from their own lines, enveloped in a thick mist, with no knowledge of how many of the enemy might be directly opposed to them. The chance of being surrounded and cut off seemed very good indeed.

For an instant Harold was undecided what to do, but it was only for an instant.

“Forward!” he shouted at the top of his lungs, and springing out of the shell-hole, he dashed ahead. Thomas and Beam were not far behind, Boyle only stopping for a moment to hurl one of his hand grenades in front of him into the fog. There was a loud crash as the bomb exploded, and then the three Americans advanced with a yell.

Their ruse was successful. The Germans, thinking they had been surprised by a large force,

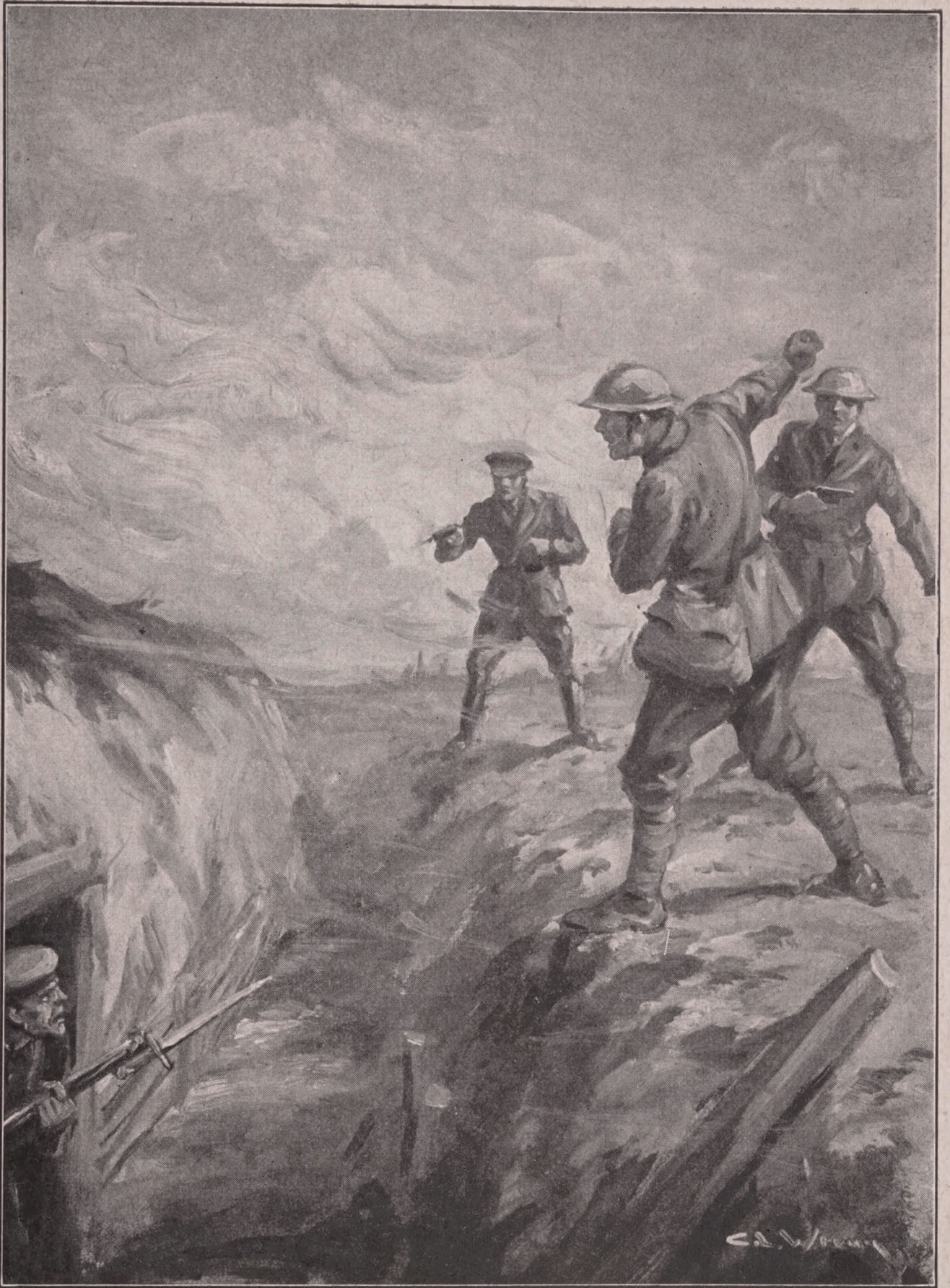
broke and ran. Shadowy figures, making for cover, could be dimly seen through the mists, and the three Americans followed in hot pursuit. The Germans had scurried for an underground shelter and pell-mell they plunged into the entrance.

Harold and his two corporals were upon them as the last German in line was about to hurry below. This German, surprised to see only three Americans, when he had expected a large company, became furiously angry and turned viciously upon his pursuers, while he called to his comrades to come out and fight. Boyle shot him through the body. The German's knees gave way beneath him, he sank to the ground, and one foot slipping on the lip of a nearby shell hole, he toppled over backwards and disappeared from sight. Another German appeared at the entrance to the dugout. Boyle put a bullet through his brain.

"That'll teach yez a lesson!" he cried savagely. "Give 'em a couple of bombs, Howard!"

Beam tossed two hand-grenades down the entrance of the underground shelter.

Meanwhile Harold had spied two Germans dragging a machine gun to the top of a crater just outside the trench. There was not a moment to lose, if the Americans were to save themselves from



“ ‘Give ’em a couple of bombs, Howard!’ ”

being mowed down by the hail of death the machine would soon be spouting in their direction.

“Follow me!” shouted Harold, and he sprang for the shelter of a nearby crater.

Boyle and Beam came tumbling in after their young lieutenant, and an instant later Howard hurled a grenade at the two Germans with the machine gun, before they had had a chance to turn it on the three Americans. The bomb burst with a loud detonation, and one of the Germans was killed. The other, forgetting all about the machine gun, turned and ran.

“No, you don’t, Fritzie!” cried Boyle, as springing out of the shell hole he aimed his automatic at the fleeing German and fired. The bullet went wild, but Boyle was not to give up so easily, and started in pursuit. He was younger and more agile than the fleeing German, and gained on him rapidly. Presently he was only a few steps behind him, he was in a position where he could not miss, and he shot his enemy in the back. Another German was accounted for.

He turned to see his two companions taking possession of the abandoned machine gun. He hurried to rejoin them, and passing on his way the entrance to the underground shelter where the

Germans had taken refuge, he threw two hand grenades down the opening.

"This luck can't last," he exclaimed, as he joined Harold and Beam. "I can hear Germans all around us."

"We'd better run for it," said Harold. "Let's take the machine gun with us."

Thomas and Beam picked it up, and staggering somewhat under its weight, they started through the mist in the direction of their own trenches.

"The noise our pistols and grenades have made will alarm the whole German army," said Beam. "They'll be here in crowds inside of two minutes."

"Just what I was thinking," said Harold. "We're still inside their lines, you know."

"This mist'll save our lives," panted Boyle. "They'll never find us in the fog, and I guess we've left 'em something to think about."

"We're not safe yet," warned Harold. "I think we'd better leave the machine gun. We can make better time without it."

"I'd hate to leave it," Boyle protested wistfully.

"I know that," said Harold. "Still it's holding us back. Put it down."

The two corporals were starting to obey when Harold suddenly saw figures moving about in the mist ahead of them.

"Germans ahead!" he exclaimed softly.

"We're cut off," exclaimed Beam in dismay.

"S'pose we are," panted Thomas. "We're not dead yet, and they haven't got us by a good sight."

"Jump in here," ordered Harold, springing into a shell-hole. "Bring the machine gun."

The two corporals obeyed instantly. A moment later they were crouching beside Harold, and had dropped the machine gun into position.

"Let 'em go," cried Boyle. "You feed 'em, Howard."

Beam fed the machine gun with the long strips of cartridges which they had captured and Thomas directed the fire.

Phantom figures appeared through the mist in front, and in their direction Boyle aimed his weapon. The Germans were headed in their way and seemed to be in strong force. The sharp rattle of the machine gun was joined by shots from Harold's automatic pistol, and four Germans were

seen to fall. The remainder ran around in great confusion.

"Come on!" shouted Harold, placing another clip of cartridges in his revolver, and springing out of the shell-hole. "Leave the machine gun, and follow me."

Boyle and Beam kicked the machine gun over into the mud and hastened after their young lieutenant.

"Surrender!" shouted Harold, flourishing his revolver.

Eleven Germans held up their hands in token of submission.

"Kamerad! Kamerad!" they cried eagerly.

"We better beat it quick, Lieutenant," exclaimed Boyle. "When they find out there's only three of us, there'll be the dickens to pay."

"Take their arms away from them," Harold ordered. "We'll see if we can't bluff them."

While Howard and Thomas busied themselves relieving their eleven prisoners of the weapons they carried, Harold pretended to carry on a conversation with some one a short distance away in the fog.

"Hold back a little," he shouted. "We don't want you quite yet."

The two corporals worked hard at their task, and soon had collected numerous weapons. Revolvers, hand grenades, clubs, and rifles were taken from the Germans and piled in a heap upon the ground nearby.

"Keep close to us," shouted Harold into the fog. "We're going to start now."

The Germans, although they could not understand what Harold was saying, took it for granted that he was conversing with other American soldiers, and so well did the ruse work that not one of them made any effort to get away, or even to resist being deprived of his weapons.

When the work of disarming the eleven prisoners was finished, Boyle turned to Harold, drew himself up stiffly, and saluted.

"All present or accounted for, Lieutenant," he reported.

"Good," exclaimed Harold. "Now to run for it."

"Hurry on now!" he ordered the Germans, while he waved his revolver in the direction of the American lines. The prisoners turned and started slowly across No Man's Land.

"Get up ahead there, Beam," ordered Harold.

"Boyle, you go along to one side, and I'll follow behind."

The procession started, but the prisoners moved slowly, and Harold began to worry lest enemy reinforcements, hurrying to the scene, should arrive and cut them off.

"Hurry it up there!" he shouted to Boyle. "We've got no time to lose."

"Beat it, youse!" ordered Thomas sharply, starting to run. The prisoners looked at him in surprise, but made no effort to increase their pace.

"They don't understand English," Boyle complained to Harold. "Maybe you could try a little French on them."

"Allez! Vite!" (Go! Quickly!) ordered Harold, and one of the Germans evidently comprehended, for he began to run, and after a guttural exclamation to his comrades, they started to follow him.

At double time they hurried through the mist in the direction of the American trenches. Harold was congratulating himself on their good fortune, but he was too wise to think that as yet they were entirely out of danger. A great many things might happen among the mists of No Man's Land, and he feared that if the Germans should discover that their captors were only three in number they

might make trouble. True, they were unarmed, but being eleven against three, it was conceivable that, being desperate men, they could overpower their captors and get away.

As these thoughts were passing through his mind he noticed that the prisoners were beginning to talk among themselves, and he feared they suspected the true state of affairs.

“Look out there!” he warned his corporal. “These fellows are becoming suspicious.”

He had scarcely finished speaking when a big German in the front ranks, drew a pistol which he had concealed under his tunic, and fired point blank at Beam, the bullet piercing the corporal’s back. Without a sound Beam sank to the ground.

Immediately the procession halted, and as the German turned to fire at Boyle next, the remaining ten prisoners made as if to bolt. As the German aimed at Thomas, Harold was upon him. Two quick shots from his automatic accounted for him, and Boyle at once picked up the German’s revolver and held it in his right hand, ready for instant use. He flourished it at the other prisoners and if they had had any further idea of running away, they quickly changed their minds. The whole band was cowed at once.

“Pretty close call, Lieutenant,” remarked Boyle grimly. “How about poor Howard?”

He leaned over his wounded friend, and felt for his heart beats, while Harold stood guard. A moment later Beam opened his eyes and looked about him dazedly.

“What happened?” he inquired feebly.

“Yez got shot,” said Boyle briefly. “How do ye feel?”

“All right,” replied Beam, and tried to rise to his feet. It was no use, however, and he sank back with a groan.

“Stay where ye are,” ordered Boyle. “Two o’ these guys ’ll carry ye.”

“Pick him up,” Thomas directed two of the prisoners. At first they did not understand, but by means of signs, Boyle soon showed them what he meant, and presently the gravely wounded corporal was being carried towards his own lines.

The body of the German who had shot Beam was left lying where it had fallen, and with Boyle and Harold in charge of the squad of prisoners, the march was continued. Like cats watching mice, the young Americans guarded the Germans and without further incident they presently came within sight of their trenches.

"I'll be glad to get in," remarked Boyle solemnly.

"Yes," Harold agreed. "So shall I."

"I've got the drumstick of a chicken I saved in my dugout. I think it's going to taste pretty good."

"I guess it will," smiled Harold. "I'm hungry myself."

A moment later they herded their prisoners into the American first line trench, and turned the wounded Beam over to the stretcher bearers to take to the nearest point where medical aid could be given.

"You needn't come any further," Harold said to Boyle. "I'll see that these prisoners get to the major's post of command all right."

Boyle saluted, and remembering the drumstick which he had carefully hidden away in his dugout, hastened in quest of it. He met many of his friends in the company on the way, who wanted to know all about his recent experiences, but Corporal Boyle was hungry, and when he was in that condition he let nothing interfere with his intention to satisfy his appetite for food. Moreover, he desired a few moments to think over the story he intended to tell his comrades, for let it be

known, Thomas Boyle loved to make a good story out of what he had done, and if it did not entirely agree with the truth, that condition did not worry him. In fact, he intended to exaggerate all he could, and he wanted to eat his chicken leg all by himself and think out the details of the tale he would relate.

Presently he came to the dugout, and entering he quickly went to the wooden box in the corner where the drumstick had been concealed. He smiled to himself in anticipation of the feast he was about to have, and he even whistled a gay tune as he opened the wooden box. One glance inside, however, and he started back in amazement, and his eyes bulged wide in their sockets and his jaw dropped.

“Well——” he began, and got no further.

The drumstick was gone.

CHAPTER VIII

A MAN OF MYSTERY

AS Boyle was standing, staring in wonderment at the box, and pondering over the mysterious disappearance of his drumstick, one of the members of his company, a private named Dobbs, entered the dugout. Boyle turned upon him angrily.

“Look here, Dobbs,” he exclaimed. “I had a chicken leg hidden in this box, and now it’s gone. Do ye know who took it?”

“Why I saw Burn——” began Dobbs, and then he checked himself hastily. He did not mean to tell tales on anybody if he could help it.

“What’s that?” demanded Boyle. “Burnett, did you say?”

“I didn’t say anybody,” Dobbs exclaimed, a guilty look on his face.

“Well I suspected Burnett right away,” said Thomas. “I’ll fix him.”

He hastened to leave the dugout, and once more in the trench made his way towards the spot where he had seen Burnett when he came in.

Sure enough he spied the man he suspected of the theft sitting with two companions on the firing-step of the trench. They were chatting together, and the subject they were discussing was a gruesome one. Charlton, one of the men, was saying that for every man in the war a bullet had been molded.

"Your bullet may be in some German soldier's belt now," he said to Burnett.

"With my name on it, I suppose," remarked Burnett dryly.

"Not really," said Charlton, "but it's probably ticketed for you just the same."

"You're a cheerful sort of a crab," exclaimed Burnett. "I suppose that bullet with my name on it wouldn't hit any one else, would it?"

"No."

"Well, I hope it does a clean job anyway," said Burnett.

"My bullet may be a big shell for all I know," spoke up Charlton. "There may be several names on a shell, of course."

"But of course it won't hit any one whose name

it hasn't got," Burnett remarked with a sarcastic note in his voice.

"Of course not," Charlton agreed, "and then you must remember that some bullets have no names on them, and the names of some soldiers aren't on bullets. We're not all going to get killed you know."

"Certainly we're not," exclaimed Burnett. "You're talking a lot of rot anyway. You can't tell me that every bullet is meant for a certain man. At any rate there are plenty of things meant for one man which find their way inside somebody else."

"A leg of chicken for instance," exclaimed Boyle, who had approached unobserved, and had heard the last of the conversation.

At this remark the three men who had been talking together glanced up in surprise, and a deep red flush began to spread itself over Burnett's face.

"What are you talking about?" he demanded.

"You know what I'm talking about," said Thomas. "Why did you eat my drumstick?"

"Did that belong to you?" exclaimed Burnett, feigning great surprise.

"You know it did."

"Why," said Burnett, "I just happened to be rummaging around in the dugout when I ran across that wooden box. I saw the drumstick inside and thought some one must have gone off and forgotten it. So I ate it."

"So kind of ye," sneered Thomas. He fixed his eye upon the culprit with a look of deep disdain, and then turned and walked away.

"Tell us about your party," said Charlton. "What did you do out there this morning?"

"Beam is pretty near dead, I guess," said Boyle ignoring the question. "Too bad he had to be the one when there are so many fellows around here that we could get along without just as well as not." He cast a scornful glance at Burnett and continued on his way, mad through and through. A few moments later he was sleeping in his bunk.

Meanwhile Harold had led his ten prisoners before the battalion commander. Beam had been dispatched with all speed to the nearest dressing station, where his wound was looked after, and he was then passed on to the base hospital.

The major began to question the prisoners through an interpreter when a strange thing happened. One of the men in the German uniform

stepped a pace forward, saluted, and addressed the major in excellent English.

“I’m an American, sir,” he said.

Both the major and Harold were greatly surprised at this sudden development, as were the other officers standing nearby.

“You’re an American?” exclaimed the major. “What do you mean?”

“Just what I say, sir. I’m an American, and I lived in Chicago for over ten years.”

“Then what are you doing in the German army?” the major demanded.

“I was born in Germany,” said the man, “but I went to America when I was eighteen years old and I became a naturalized citizen. When the war broke out I was in Germany on business and I couldn’t get out of the country. They wouldn’t recognize my American citizenship, and though they didn’t put me into the army at first, now that they’re getting hard up for men they drafted me into service.”

This was a remarkable tale, and the major looked at the man narrowly to see if he was telling the truth. The German, or rather the American, gazed back steadily from his pale blue eyes, how-

ever, and seemed from his demeanor to be stating what was true.

"Why didn't you say you were an American when we captured you?" inquired Harold, who was amazed at the story the man had told.

"I didn't think it was safe, sir," the man replied.

"Why not?"

"Well, you see the Germans hate the Americans almost more than they do the English. If I had said who I was with all these fellows around me, I probably wouldn't have lived very long, in spite of the fact that they were unarmed and had surrendered. They probably would have thought me a spy too, and they might have blamed me for leading them into a trap."

The explanation sounded reasonable, but Harold could not help having a vague feeling that all was not right.

"What do you want us to do with you?" asked the major.

"I want to enlist in the American army," said the man. "I want to fight the Germans. I hate them. I have several scores to pay off for what they did to me."

“Haven’t you got relatives in the German army?” the major inquired.

“I have,” the man admitted, “but that doesn’t make any difference. I hate them all. They are a bad crowd, and the fewer Germans left in the world, the better.”

“That’s the kind of talk we like to hear,” exclaimed the major. “What’s your name?”

“Hoffmann, sir.”

Harold started perceptibly at this. He remembered the trouble his younger brother Bob and his brother’s friend, Hugh Reith, had had with a man named Karl Hoffmann back in their home town of High Ridge. The same name had seemed to haunt them even after they had enlisted in the aviation corps and come to France. Could it be that this man had any connection with that other Hoffmann? Harold was puzzled and as he looked closely at the man he fancied he could see a resemblance to Karl Hoffmann, who had once been foreman in his father’s steel company. This man had said that he had lived in Chicago while sojourning in America, but that did not mean he had no connection with the Hoffmann in High Ridge.

“What’s your first name?” the major asked.

“Hugo, sir.”

"And you want to enlist, do you? You've got a real German name."

"I can't help where I was born, sir," said Hoffmann respectfully. "I'm sorry it was in Germany, but I think you can hardly blame me for it."

"I suppose not," laughed the major. "You seem to be all right, but of course we shall want to know more about you before we can think of taking you into our army. Stand aside for the present, and I'll talk to you again later."

Hoffmann obeyed respectfully, and the major continued with his examination of the other prisoners. Much information of value was obtained from the men whom Harold and his two companions had captured that morning. It seemed that they were from a Bavarian division, which for the past year and a half had been stationed on the Russian front. Recently they had been shifted to the West, and the men were not in the least pleased with the change. They had had a comparatively easy time of it while opposing the disorganized Russian armies, but being sent to France was a different matter, for the English, French and Americans were a superior brand of fighters. One of the prisoners confessed that when they had received news of their transfer many of the men had

looked upon it as meaning that all hope of coming through the war alive was lost to them.

The examination of the prisoners was ended at last, a complete record made of what they had disclosed, and they were marched off to a detention camp. That is, all of them except the one who claimed to be an American, who had given his name as Hugo Hoffmann. He was told to accompany the major to battalion headquarters, where he was to be questioned further.

Harold's duties were over for the present, and he made his way back to his bunk to enjoy a well-earned rest. The preceding hours had been exacting ones for the young lieutenant, and now that the excitement and strain were over he realized how tired he was, and how badly he needed sleep.

CHAPTER IX

A NEW SOLDIER

ALL that day and all the following night Harold slept. He had had no idea how exhausted he had been, but when he awoke finally he was once more completely refreshed, and ready for whatever duties might be demanded of him.

He partook of a hearty breakfast, and shortly afterwards was summoned to appear before the major.

“Maybe you’re going to be promoted,” whispered George Carter, an affectionate smile crinkling around the corners of his black eyes. “I hope so.”

“I hope not,” said Harold fervently. “A first lieutenant’s job is all that I care about handling just at present.”

He made his way as quickly as possible along the trenches back towards the battalion headquarters, and soon was ushered into the presence of

the major. To his surprise he recognized Hugo Hoffmann, the man whom they had captured the day before, standing beside the major talking with him affably.

Harold waited until the major looked up and recognized him, then he saluted smartly, his salute was returned, and the major opened the conversation.

“Mr. Cook,” he said, “I’ve got a recruit for you.”

“Yes, sir,” said Harold, striving not to show by the expression on his face the surprise he felt at this remark.

“Hoffmann here,” continued the major, “wants to join our army. I am convinced of his honesty, I think he can be of great service to us, and accordingly I have made the necessary arrangements. Will you fix it with Captain Norris to have the proper equipment issued to him from the quartermaster, and take him into your company? Hoffmann has a great knowledge of the German army, and can be of much assistance to you, as he is entirely familiar with the enemy trench system directly opposite the spot where you are located.”

“Yes, sir,” repeated Harold, and as the con-

versation seemed to be at an end, he saluted, beckoned Hoffmann to follow him, and departed.

It was not for the young lieutenant to question any order he received from his superior officer, but he could not help wondering if the major had not made a mistake. No one knew anything about Hoffmann except what he had himself volunteered, and to Harold it seemed as if the major perhaps had acted too hastily. If the man was honest it was true that he could render valuable service to the Americans, but on the other hand if he so desired he undoubtedly would be able to work much mischief. Harold glanced at his companion as they walked along.

"You're taking a big chance," he said, watching the man narrowly.

"How so, sir?" inquired Hoffmann.

"Suppose you should be captured by the Germans."

"I'd be shot," said the man simply.

"Worse than that," remarked Harold drily.

"I'm willing to take that chance."

"Suppose you're not telling the truth and you got found out. I warn you that the chances are against my ever being able to save you from our men."

Hoffmann laughed easily. "I'm telling the truth all right," he said. "I mean it when I say that I want to fight the Germans."

"I hope you do," said Harold.

A short time later he turned his charge over to Captain Norris, who gave him an order on the quartermaster for equipment, and for the time being Harold left the new member of his company with one of his corporals.

Harold passed on through the communication trench until he reached the first line once more. Arriving there he heard a great commotion going on, and the sharp rat-a-tat-tat of heavy machine gun fire. Bullets from the German trenches were spraying all about, and every man hugged the side of the trench and kept as low as he possibly could.

"What's the excitement?" demanded Harold of George Carter, who was kneeling on the firing step, his eyes glued to a trench periscope through which he surveyed No Man's Land.

"Take a look," said George, moving away to give Harold an opportunity to see.

Harold glanced through the periscope, and an exclamation of surprise escaped his lips at the sight which greeted his eyes. Three Germans, rifles in hand, were rushing at top speed towards

the American trenches, and close behind them, urging them on, were three American soldiers, who crouched low as they ran and constantly exhorted their prisoners to make more speed. Bullets from the machine guns in the German trenches kicked up the ground all about the speeding men.

The American soldiers in the trenches cheered lustily for their comrades to make haste and bring in their captives. It was more thrilling, and excitement ran higher than at any football game Harold had ever seen. Here was a race against death, with three German prisoners and life itself as the stake of victory. One of the Germans faltered for a moment, but a prick from the bayonet of one of his captors urged him forward again with a squeal of pain. Loud cheers from the on-lookers greeted this occurrence. Nearer and nearer to their goal came the little band of six. The trenches were scarcely a hundred feet distant now, and with a final, supreme effort the three Americans drove their captives over the parapet, and down into the trench among the wildly-cheering and enthusiastic soldiers.

A dozen eager privates leaped upon the three prisoners, and almost in less time than it takes to tell it, had deprived them of all their weapons

and rendered them entirely harmless. The Americans, who had made the capture, were too blown for a moment to do more than lie panting and puffing at the bottom of the trench.

"Some race, bo," remarked the irrepressible Boyle, who, of course, was in the center of things as quickly as possible.

"Say," gasped one of the three American soldiers, "I never traveled so fast before in all my life."

Every one was in good spirits at the outcome of the scene that had just been enacted before their eyes. That particular section of the trench line had been very quiet lately, and the men welcomed a diversion, especially one that brought success to their side. Furthermore, German prisoners were always interesting.

Lieutenant Carter at once took charge, and after complimenting the three soldiers who had made the capture, he turned to the prisoners. One of them was an under-officer and the other two were privates, while the insignia on their uniforms gave the information that they belonged to one of the regiments of the Prussian Guard, the crack corps of the German army.

They were surly, sullen-looking men, very dif-

ferent from the prisoners whom Harold and Boyle and Beam had brought in the day previous. Those men were Bavarians, far more agreeable individuals than these scowling Prussians. As a matter of fact the Bavarians had seemed rather relieved at being taken, and at no time had they made any attempt to conceal their dislike of their Prussian countrymen.

"We'll send these fellows on back to the major," ordered George Carter. "One man will be enough to show them the way. Here, Boyle, I'll put you in charge."

Boyle saluted, and stepped forward eagerly. This was the sort of work he loved.

"Search them," continued Lieutenant Carter. "Take their bayonets off their rifles, see that they have no ammunition and then give them their guns to carry. You don't want to carry them, do you Boyle?"

"Thank you, no," replied Thomas with a grin. "They look strong enough to do that."

Carter's orders were soon carried out, each German had his rifle returned to him, and the little procession was ready to proceed.

"You'd better walk behind, Boyle," said

George. "You can keep your eye on them better that way."

"Yes, sir," grinned Thomas, delighted with the work he had to do.

The entrance to the communication trench was near at hand, and close by the corner George Carter took his place. "Go ahead," ordered Boyle. He pointed in the direction of the communication trench. The Germans scowled at him darkly, but he raised his rifle threateningly and they started in the direction he had indicated.

Proud as a peacock at the responsibility thrust upon him, Boyle fell in behind, and found opportunity to bestow a couple of knowing winks upon his admiring comrades. He did not forget his prisoners, however, and watched their every move. As they approached the communication trench, George indicated by signs that they were to turn off there. He flattened himself against the wall of the trench to make room for them to pass. Then something happened very suddenly and unexpectedly.

As the German who was in the lead came opposite the spot where George Carter was standing, he stopped short, let his rifle slip from his shoulder, seized the barrel with both hands and then

swinging it aloft he brought it down with all his strength, striking the unprepared young lieutenant full in the ribs. There was a dull, sickening thud, and George sank limply to the ground, a tiny stream of red flowing from his nose and mouth.

For a moment there was absolute silence. Then, when the soldiers standing around realized what had taken place, a full-throated roar of rage broke forth, and men who a moment before had been interested spectators of the proceedings, suddenly became transformed into wild, ravening animals. Their beloved young lieutenant, whom every one of them loved, had been treacherously struck down before their very eyes. It was more than these spirited young Americans could stand.

Only a week before they had found one of their men, who had been cut off from a night patrol by the Germans, lying out between the trenches, his body mutilated almost beyond recognition. Another comrade, captured by the enemy, had been crucified over the German trenches in plain sight of his countrymen. An American bullet mercifully had put an end to his sufferings. These young Americans were good sportsmen and clean fighters, but what they had seen of German methods and practices had changed their smol-

dering rage into strong and violent hatred. When the Huns tried some of their tricks in an American trench it was the last straw.

With a yell like that of a madman Boyle sprang at the man who had so foully struck down the young lieutenant. Using his rifle like a club he brought it down with all his strength upon the head of the offending Prussian. The man's head was shattered like a broken eggshell; never again would he break the rules of war and decency. As for the other two Germans, the outraged Americans sprang upon them, and before Harold, who was standing close by, had an opportunity to interfere, they too were dead.

"Attention!" ordered Harold loudly, and the soldiers, unconsciously obeying the well-known command, drew themselves up, their heels together and their arms at their sides. "What does this mean?" he demanded sharply. "Remember you're not Germans to do a thing like that."

Not a man blinked an eyelash. With stern, white-lipped faces, every one of them stood motionless, eyes to the front, without moving a muscle.

"Burnett and Charlton, pick up Lieutenant Car-

ter, and see that he gets medical attention at the earliest possible moment."

The two men hastened to obey, and quickly procuring a stretcher, placed the injured young lieutenant on it, and carried him away.

At this moment Captain Norris appeared with Hugo Hoffmann, who was now wearing a regulation United States army uniform. He had not been aware of the recent excitement and knew nothing about George Carter's mishap, or how it had occurred. He looked in amazement at the three dead Germans, and at the soldiers standing at attention.

"What's this, Lieutenant?" he asked.

Harold saluted, and explained what had occurred. Captain Norris listened gravely until Harold had finished.

"I'll take charge of the affair," he said. "Do you know the names of the men who were responsible for this business?"

Harold glanced along the row of soldiers, and as he did so, his eye met Thomas Boyle's for the fraction of a second.

"They all had a hand in it, sir," he replied. Boyle was the one man whose actions he had seen; the others were in such a tangle of arms, and legs,

and bodies that he had not been able to see which ones were actually responsible for the killing of the Germans. He did not like to mention Boyle's name to the captain, for why should he be punished more than the others? He thought, by saying that all of them had had a hand in it—which was true—his loyal and stout-hearted corporal would not suffer any more than the others. Furthermore he was so affected by what had happened to George that he felt almost glad for a moment at what the men had done. That too in spite of the fact that he knew it was entirely wrong.

Perhaps Captain Norris sensed something of what was taking place in his young lieutenant's mind, for he did not press the matter further.

"I suppose they all did their share," he said.
"Thank you, Lieutenant."

Harold gave way, and took his stand beside Hugo Hoffmann.

"You see what happens to men who don't play fair," he said.

CHAPTER X

IN THE AIR

GEORGE CARTER was taken to the hospital, gravely injured. Two of his ribs had been broken by the force of the blow, and one shattered bone had been driven into his lungs, puncturing them badly. His internal organs had been seriously torn, and for a time there was doubt whether or not he would survive. A robust constitution and a strong body did their work well, however, and when a few days had elapsed the doctors announced that he would recover. But there was no chance of his being fit for active service again for many weeks to come.

Captain Norris did not press the matter of the punishment of the men who had inflicted such swift retribution on the three Germans. Possibly he felt, as Harold had, that perhaps they could not be blamed too much for what they had done. Every man in the company, and every officer in the regiment, loved George Carter, and his

loss was keenly felt. His manly qualities of courage and devotion to duty had endeared him to all with whom he had come in contact.

Meanwhile life in the trenches went on much as before for there was little activity on this section of the front. There was the usual artillery firing every day and night, the patrols went out into No Man's Land as usual, and now and then a brush with an enemy party lent spice to life. There was a small patch of woods between the lines at this sector and there it was that the three Germans had been captured. The three Americans who had made the capture had been on patrol duty, and being stationed in the woods, had seen the Germans approaching and prepared an ambush for them. How successful it had proven to be has been told in the preceding chapter; the Germans, taken completely by surprise, had had no choice but to give themselves up when the Americans had sprung out at them.

Hugo Hoffmann was proving himself an excellent soldier. Harold did not trust him entirely, but he had to confess that in spite of his doubts there seemed to be no good reason why he should question the man's sincerity. He was quiet, and

well-behaved, and already had imparted much valuable information to the Intelligence Corps concerning the German trenches and troops opposite the American positions.

Harold wrote to his younger brother Bob about it all, however. Bob's flying squadron was stationed somewhere near that particular part of France, Harold knew, but just where he, of course, could not be positive. Letters addressed to him merely stated the number of his squadron and were delivered through headquarters. The two brothers had not seen each other since Harold had landed in France, but naturally they corresponded frequently.

So Harold had written to Bob telling him about this man Hoffmann who had so unexpectedly become a member of the American forces. He had not felt sure of the fellow from the start, though everything Hoffmann did or said seemed to confirm the statement he had made that he hated the Germans, and wished to fight against them. Still Harold did not feel easy, and he desired Bob's opinion.

Nothing happened, however, to intimate in any way that there was ground for Harold's uneasiness, and presently the regiment was ordered out

of the trenches and back of the lines for a rest. A small French village was selected for them to occupy, and the men were billeted (that is quartered) in the various houses of the town. Harold, Captain Norris, and two other officers were assigned to a small whitewashed dwelling, presided over by a talkative Frenchwoman whose husband and two sons were all at the front. All three had been wounded, but fortunately not so badly that they could not fight, and one of them, the elder boy, had been awarded the *croix de guerre* for rescuing a wounded comrade under heavy fire at Verdun.

It was very interesting to Harold to live in a French home, and he improved the opportunity to learn many of the French words he heard. He had a slight knowledge of the language before he came to France, and he now was desirous of perfecting and adding to his small vocabulary. The French residents of the house were just as eager to learn English, however, and as they seemed to be more apt at acquiring new languages than the Americans, the result was that the soldiers did not learn much French, but the French people did learn considerable English.

The French family consisted of Mme. Lamar-

tine, a daughter sixteen years old, and two boys, Pierre, who was twelve, and Henri, who was eight. At least these were the members of the family who were at home, for as has already been stated the husband and two elder sons were with the army. Little Henri soon became a great favorite with the officers; he was a sturdy little fellow with black hair and eyes and a winning smile that no one could resist. All day long he played soldier, marching up and down with his stubby wooden gun, and never did he fail to present arms if any troops passed through the village. Nor did he ever miss an opportunity to salute an officer, and few there were who neglected to acknowledge the courtesy by saluting in return.

Harold had been sitting at the window of the Lamartine dwelling, writing home to his mother, and incidentally watching Henri who waited in front of the house hoping for an opportunity to show himself to some passing officer. For a long time he had waited in vain, but he marched and counter-marched, and went through the manual of arms while he kept an anxious eye on the highway for approaching soldiers. At length his patience was rewarded, and Harold saw a young American officer coming down the road.

Henri stood at attention, and as the officer was about to pass by he saluted stiffly, his face as solemn as an owl's. The young officer looked at the diminutive soldier with a smile of amusement, then catching the spirit of the game, he stopped, clicked his heels together, and returned the salute as gravely as it had been rendered.

Henri blushed with delight and pride. He was accustomed to having his salutes returned but never so formally as this. Harold was watching the performance with interest, when suddenly he sprang to his feet, nearly upsetting the table at which he was seated, and dashed wildly for the door. He had recognized the young officer as a brother of his.

“Hey, Skinnay!” he called.

Thus addressed, the lieutenant stopped and looked around in amazement. Then he spied Harold in the doorway.

“Hello, Harold,” he cried joyfully. “What are you doing here?”

“What are you doing here yourself?” demanded Harold.

CHAPTER XI

THE CRY FROM THE HOUSE

THE excitement of the two brothers was so keen that for a brief time even the peril of their surroundings and the fact of the Big War itself were almost ignored.

"I never was so glad to see any one in my life," exclaimed Bob. "I always thought you were a good looking boy, but you never looked so good to me before."

"That's the way to talk," laughed Harold. "My, how you have grown! You're not my kid brother any more."

"Don't talk to me that way," retorted Bob in some confusion. "I'm sensitive about being told that I am getting to be a big boy. The fact is I was growing some after you left home, but, honestly, since I've been over here in the Flying Corps I've gained seventeen pounds."

"That's all because you did some work to-day," retorted his brother.

Bob made as if he was about to seize his brother

in his arms, but the latter easily evaded him and the boys once more resumed their interesting conversation.

“When did you last hear from home?” inquired Harold when at last each had given the other the full outline of his experiences since he had landed in France.

“I had a letter last week.”

“How are they all?” demanded Harold eagerly.

“Well. At least that’s what they write. I wonder sometimes if they would tell us the truth if anything did really happen.”

“I think they would. You know that’s father’s way. You can always depend absolutely upon what he says.”

At his urgent invitation his brother was received into the little house in which the young lieutenant had been billeted. Bob’s machine required some overhauling and it was uncertain just how soon he would be able to return to his base. Neither of the boys, however, spent much time in lamenting the possible delay. There were so many questions to be asked, such varied experiences to be related, as well as the pleasure each had in the company of the other, that both were content to remain for a time as they were.

At last after most of their topics of conversation had been exhausted, Bob told his brother of his own suspicions of Hugo Hoffmann.* He also related the faithfulness with which Burnett had discharged his duties and the friendly manner in which he had aided him several times when he had been perplexed about his machine.

"There are a good many suspicious characters here," suggested Harold. "Several times we have found men who have been taken out of the trenches, and never were heard of again."

"What do you mean? Were they Germans?"

"Not all of them, but every one is watching because we are all afraid some desperate villain may be willing to sell his life if he can only do some damage to us."

For a long time after supper the boys continued their conversation, much of which now concerned the suspicions they both entertained of Hugo Hoffmann. Bob related how Hoffmann had again appeared. He declared that the explanation that Hoffmann was in the secret service did not satisfy him. There was still a great mystery surrounding the man and this also concerned Burnett.

At last Harold declared he must return to his

*See "Bob Cook and the German Air Fleet."

post. Bob, however, insisted upon accompanying him as far as he would be permitted to go. The boys walked slowly along the street of the little village, Henri, much to his disgust, being refused permission to accompany the soldiers. The little fellow had stuck close to the brothers throughout their stay, insisting upon being seated first in the lap of the aviator and then in that of the young soldier.

“Maybe,” suggested Harold, as the boys departed from the house, “I can get Captain Carter (Lieutenant Carter had just been promoted) to release me for a little while when I tell him what has happened to me. It isn’t often that one has a visit from his only brother. I think I’m the only one in my company who has seen any of his family since he landed in France.”

“That’s all right,” said Bob good-naturedly. “I’ll go with you and I’m sure the captain will not refuse when he sees what a fine representative of your family has looked you up.”

“He might not be so enthusiastic if we told him how it all happened,” said Harold demurely.

“You’re the same big brother that you have always been,” laughed Bob. “You take yourself so seriously that you think all the wisdom of the

world will die with you when you stop breathing.”

“It isn’t so *much* that I have as it is the *little* that some other people have,” retorted Harold.

“I was just about to say——”

Whatever was in the young soldier’s mind was instantly forgotten when at that moment there came a sudden cry from the little house that stood at the end of the village street. The little white-washed structure was far from every other dwelling place and the building had not been occupied since Harold had been billeted in the village.

“What was that? What was that?” demanded Bob in a whisper as he grasped the arm of his brother.

“I don’t know,” replied Harold, “but it’s something that must be looked into. Come on and we’ll soon find out. Is your revolver all right?”

“Yes,” replied Bob.

Both boys were silent as they turned swiftly in the direction from which the unexpected cry had come. The startling sound had not been repeated. As they ran forward, the boys soon discovered that others had been startled by the weird call for help and also were running toward the place from which the alarming sound had been heard.

The Cook brothers, however, were in advance of the others and soon were approaching the place they were seeking. As they drew near they discovered a man clad in an American uniform lying prostrate on the ground near the road. Instantly hastening to the spot, the boys turned the man upon his back, for he was lying face downward.

"It's Sam Harrison," exclaimed Harold in a low voice.

"Is he dead?" inquired Bob in a whisper.

"I think so," replied Harold, who already had loosened the garments of the man and had placed his hand over his heart. "I think he's dead," he added.

By this time several other soldiers had arrived at the place and eagerly were inquiring as to the cause of the alarm.

"Sam Harrison has been shot," explained Harold briefly.

"Who did it?" demanded one of the soldiers.

"That's what I should like to find out," answered Harold. "It may be that a spent bullet or a piece of a shell struck him. The first thing that must be done is to take him away for help."

Conversation ceased as the men gently raised

the fallen soldier and carried him in the direction of the hospital.

"You stay here with me, Bob," directed Harold. "I want to look around here a bit and find out whether or not the man was shot by any one in the house."

"Do you really think he was?" asked Bob excitedly.

"I tell you that's what I want to find out. If I knew already I shouldn't be doing what I'm going to do now."

"What's that?"

"I tell you I'm going to try to find out if there's anything wrong inside the house."

"Are you going in there in the dark?"

"It isn't very dark."

"It's dark enough though to hide any one who may be in there and you will make a good target for him when you stand in the open doorway. I think you ought to wait until some of the other men come back and we have enough to form a guard around the place."

"That's a good suggestion for a kid. I wish you would go to the hospital right away and tell the men that I want them to come back here."

“Promise me that you won’t go inside the house until we come and I’ll do it,” answered Bob.

“What do you think I am? I’m going to take my stand behind this poplar and just watch to see if any one comes out of the house.”

Meanwhile Bob sped toward the hospital and when he arrived he discovered that the men who had brought the fallen soldier to the place were still there. In response to his question he was informed that the soldier was dead. His mates were angrily discussing plans as to how the one who had shot him could be detected and what measures might be employed to punish him.

“I tell you,” one of them was saying, “Sam had a quarrel last night with one of the old men in the village. The old chap wanted to charge him five francs for a piece of chocolate. Sam told him he wouldn’t pay that much for it and the old fellow was going to have him arrested.”

“Why didn’t Sam give him back the chocolate if he didn’t want to pay for it?” inquired one of them.

“He couldn’t.”

“Why not?”

“Because he put himself outside the chocolate

so soon that there wasn't any chance to give it back."

"Didn't he pay the old man?"

"Oh, yes, he finally paid him, but he told him he was a thief and a robber. Some of these Frenchmen are very fond of the Americans."

"Right you are," spoke up another soldier promptly. "They're fond of them the way a dog is fond of a piece of meat. They think we're made of money and they want to pry loose some of it before anybody else has a chance."

"Poor Sam won't have any more trouble of that kind," said one of the soldiers.

"Right you are," acknowledged the first speaker, "but I'm wondering who shot him."

Bob Cook had arrived just in time to overhear the remark of the soldier. "My brother wants you to come back to the house," he explained simply.

"What does he want?" inquired the soldier.

"I don't know, but I have an idea that he intends to go inside the building and find out if anybody is hiding there. He is watching the place now and he wants you to come right back and stand guard over the house while he's searching it."

“Come on, fellows!” called the soldier who had been the chief spokesman of the party. “We’ll go back and stand by the lieutenant. He’s a good one, for he has always stood by us.”

Hastily the men turned and all ran quickly back in the direction of the house where Lieutenant Harold was maintaining his watch.

In a brief time the squad of eight found the young lieutenant and reported that they were willing to assist in the task he was about to undertake.

CHAPTER XII

THE SEARCH

IN the dim light it was manifest to Bob that the men were keenly excited. The mystery of the death of their comrade and the determination of the young lieutenant to investigate the interior of the house increased the interest of every soldier. The building appeared to be very old. At one corner a shell had demolished a part of the walls and given to the structure an appearance of weakness. The shot, however, had not caused the family to leave the building until the Americans had required the ground, as it was near the trenches they were enlarging.

Lieutenant Harold assembled his men and in a low voice said to them, "I suspect there is some sniper hidden in that house. I'm going to find out. That's the reason why I sent for you. I want Corporal Bliven to establish a guard. You'd better put another one on each of the three sides," he added, turning to the corporal as he spoke.

Then once more addressing the soldiers the young lieutenant continued, "I want every one of you to look sharp and see that there isn't any one making a dash from the old building."

"Who's going in?" inquired Corporal Bliven.

"I am," replied Harold quietly.

"Alone?"

"Yes, alone. There isn't any use of risking the lives of more than one man, at least at this stage of the game. If I need help you're near at hand. If I don't need help, then no one else is running any risk."

"Harold," spoke up Bob quickly. "I'm going in there with you."

Harold did not reply to the declaration of his impulsive young brother, but immediately directed the corporal to establish his guards. As soon as these arrangements had been completed Harold advanced to the front entrance of the building and halting a moment said in a loud voice, "We want you to come out of the house. We have thrown a guard around the building and if you come out peaceably there won't be any trouble. If you don't come out in that way we shall come in and drag you out and then I can tell you you won't have as pleasant a time. Your French is better

than mine," he added, turning to his brother, who had advanced to his side without any protest by the young officer. "You tell them what I have just said."

Thus bidden Bob translated into French the hail which his brother had given. There was a suspicion in his mind that his English might be understood if any one was hiding within. On the other hand it was wiser to use both languages and thus enable any one who might be concealed there to understand the demand which had been made upon him.

Neither of the boys thought of using German for it did not occur to either that a German soldier might be hidden within the crumbling walls.

No reply was given the hail although the boys waited in silence for an answer. They saw that the guards were as keenly interested as they were and the failure to elicit any response to their summons apparently was in line with the expectations of the men.

Some of them openly had declared that the soldier that had fallen had been shot by some one in the little village. It was deemed improbable that any enemy of the dead man would venture to use the house as a hiding-place because he would un-

derstand that if a gun was fired from within the building it would be equivalent to a declaration that the one who had shot had no expectation of escaping.

The young lieutenant turned to his brother and said in a low voice, "You stay right here on the piazza, Bob."

"I don't want you to go in there alone," declared Bob impulsively.

"I'm not afraid," declared the young officer. "With a guard established on three sides of the house and with you on the piazza it isn't likely that any one in the building will try to get me."

Without any further words Harold entered through the open doorway. When he pushed back the half-opened door the hinges creaked in a manner that startled his waiting brother, who immediately darted forward.

"It's nothing, Bob," explained Harold quietly. "Go back and take your stand where I told you. I must know that you are there in case you're needed."

Quickly the young lieutenant entered the building and disappeared from sight. He was easily heard as he stamped about the rooms, frequently

stopping and calling upon any one who might be there to give himself up.

The search proved unavailing when at last Lieutenant Harold had investigated every room on the ground floor and turning again to his brother he said, "Bob, you may come in here and stand at the foot of the staircase. I'm going upstairs."

Aware that it was useless to protest, Bob did as he was bidden and anxiously watched his brother as he mounted the creaking stairway.

When he had arrived at the little hallway at the head of the stairs, Harold again stopped and repeated the summons for the man within to give himself up. Once more his invitation was unheeded and no response was made to his hail.

The silence in the house became oppressive. Bob, who was still standing where his brother had ordered him to take his position, was increasingly anxious. Even the peril of flying high above the German lines had not produced the tremors which now frequently swept over him. It may have been that his anxiety for his brother was the greater because he himself was compelled to be inactive. At all events, as the slow moments passed his fears increased and he was on the point of mounting

the stairway to search for Harold when his brother again appeared.

“It is almost as light as day,” Harold said. “I’ve looked everywhere in the house and cannot find a sign of any one hiding here. And yet somehow I feel quite certain that the shot was fired from within the building.”

“Don’t you want me to come up and help you?” inquired Bob quickly.

“No,” answered Harold, who still was standing at the head of the stairway, as if he were expecting to have his summons answered. A window directly behind his brother enabled Bob to discern clearly the outlines of Harold’s figure. In his right hand he was holding a revolver and although he was talking to his brother, Harold manifestly was leaning toward the room from which he had just come.

“Come on,” said Harold at last, as he descended the stairway. “There’s nothing more to be done here to-night.”

When the young officer came out of the building he once more assembled the guard and explained that his search had been fruitless. “And yet,” he added, “I’m not dead sure that there isn’t

somebody in there. Poor Sam Harrison could tell us if only he could speak."

"Don't you want us to go up with you and turn things upside down?" inquired Corporal Bliven. "We wouldn't like anything better. We'll stick our bayonets into every hole in the walls and if there's anybody there he'll know that we aren't far away."

Harold hesitated a moment and then said quickly, "It's taking some chances, I know, but I think I'll do as you suggest. The whole crowd of you can go in together, and turn everything upside down. If you need a light I'll get one for you, but I don't like to do that unless it's absolutely necessary. A torch makes the man who is carrying it such a good target that the Boches, if any of them are in there, couldn't resist the impulse to shoot."

"You don't think there are any Germans in there, do you?" demanded Corporal Bliven sharply.

"I don't know," answered Harold. "All I'm sure of is that Sam Harrison was shot and he was right near the old house when the shooting took place."

"We'll soon find out," declared the corporal quickly. He turned to his men and in a brief time

all had entered the building to renew the search.

Meanwhile Bob and his brother remained standing in front of the building. It was possible there for them to see any one who passed either corner of the house.

The noisy shouts of the men as they continued their search of the building, the repeated calls of the young corporal who ordered his unseen enemies to give themselves up, continued. Still the house refused to give up its inmates, if any were concealed in the building.

The search continued for half an hour, but when the men at last rejoined the young lieutenant they were every one convinced that no one was hiding in the place.

"We'll have to give it up," said the lieutenant in a loud voice. A moment later, however, he whispered to the corporal, "I think that you had better leave some one on guard here. I'm not sure that there isn't some hiding-place here that we haven't found."

"That's the very thing I was going to suggest," replied the corporal quickly. "We'll leave a guard here and if anything happens I'll report to you right away."

"That's the way we'll leave it then," said the

lieutenant as he and his brother prepared to depart.

At that moment, however, a man was seen coming around the corner of the building, and to the confusion of both Harold and Bob another man was discovered approaching from the opposite side.

“That’s Hoffmann!” whispered Bob excitedly to the lieutenant. “That’s the very man I was suspicious of.”

“Who is that other fellow?”

As the man drew nearer Bob’s surprise was great. In the dim light he recognized Burnett.

CHAPTER XIII

MORE SUSPICIONS

THE approach of the men was not noticed by the soldiers. Perhaps the dim light and the interest with which they had been watching the interior of the crumbling building had made them oblivious of the approach of men clad in the uniform of their army.

To Bob Cook and his brother the unexpected appearance of the two men, about whom they had been talking, was more than a coincidence. However, both Hoffmann and Burnett did not stop nor did they speak to each other when they met and passed on the street. The Cook brothers watched them with interest until they both disappeared from sight.

Lieutenant Harold, after stationing a guard for the night at the ruined building, withdrew from the place and accompanied Bob to the house in which they had been billeted. It was late now and little Henri did not greet them. His absence

was noticed by the brothers and Bob laughingly said, "If the little chap had been with us to-night he would have insisted upon being left as a guard. He's a good sport. I don't know when I've seen a little fellow whom I liked better."

His brother laughed, but made no response and together the boys entered the house.

In the morning Bob received word that his machine was in need of additional repairs and that at least two days would be required before he could use it again. The information was not disheartening and having the privilege of being with his brother extended for two days, in a large measure relieved him of all anxiety about his return. Part of the time Harold was busy. There were drills to be maintained and the supplies must be looked after, but none of these duties interfered with the rest which was given the men when they were sent back from the trenches.

Frequently the boys talked over the mystery surrounding Hoffmann. Twice they had met the soldier in the village, but apparently he did not recognize either of them and passed, simply saluting the young officer.

"I don't know just what to make of that fellow," said Bob thoughtfully in the afternoon fol-

lowing the death of Sam Harrison. "I have been suspicious of him ever since I first saw him."

"He does have a shifty look," assented Harold, as he glanced over his shoulder at the departing man.

"Do you think he could have had anything to do with the shooting of that private last night?"

"Why should he want to shoot him?" inquired Harold, who, true to his Yankee traits, was answering one question by asking another.

"I don't know anything about that," retorted Bob. "All I know is that somebody in or near that old house shot Sam Harrison. There isn't any question about his being dead. Now, the only question left is to find out who did it."

"We shall find out," declared Harold positively.

"How do you know? What makes you so sure?"

"It always does come out if there's a traitor in the camp. He can't hide it any more than he can change the color of his eyes."

"I have heard of men who could do that. I remember one of the foremen in father's mills in High Ridge whose eyes were gray, but they became almost black when he was excited or angry."

"Just what is there about this fellow Hoffmann

that makes you so suspicious of him, Bob?" demanded Harold, ignoring his brother's words.

"That's the strange part of it all," replied Bob. "You feel it, you're almost sure of it, and yet you can't put your finger on anything that is really reliable. You can't get away from it," he added, "that he showed up near the old house right after we had searched the place. It seems to me that's a little suspicious. Doesn't it look that way to you?"

"It doesn't in itself. Of course if there is anything in what you say, why that gives a little color to the other side. What can we do more than we have been doing?"

"I think it would be a good thing if you should talk it over with your captain."

"That's a good suggestion," said Harold cordially. "I'll arrange, if I can, to go with you up to Captain Carter's quarters to-night and you can tell him your whole story. If he knows anything more than you do about Hoffmann it may help him. I'm sure of one thing, and that is that if Hoffmann is a suspicious character, then Captain Carter knows that he is."

The conversation ceased as the boys once more returned to the house in which they were billeted.

That same evening another body of troops were sent back from the front trenches for a rest in the little village. Two of these men were assigned to the house in which the Cook boys were staying and in response to their questions they were soon informed of conditions at the extreme front.

"It's a strange thing," one of the men explained, "that happened to us last night."

"What was that?" inquired the young lieutenant as the soldier ceased speaking.

"Why there were two things really," explained the soldier, "one was that the barbed wire directly in front of us somehow had been strangely cut. We don't know who did it and no one seems to know just when it was done."

"Then how do you know it was done at all?" inquired Harold, who was deeply interested in the statement.

"It was plain enough in the morning," answered the soldier. "That same night too there was a fire, or rather a signal of some kind,—at least we all believed it to be a signal,—that suddenly went up from our trenches. I don't see how it was possible for such a thing to happen and yet we all know it did for we saw this strange red light suddenly appear. We found out this morning that it

was directly above the place where the barbed wire had been cut. Naturally, we put the two things together and concluded that we had a traitor somewhere in the ranks, who was giving information to the Germans as to just when it would be safe for them to attack."

"But they didn't attack, did they?" inquired Bob.

"Not last night."

"Why not, if they had the signal and the wires were cut?"

"I don't know," said the soldier, "unless something went wrong. At all events there wasn't even a patrol seen by any of our men and yet the barbed wire was down for forty feet or more."

"Haven't you any idea how it was done?"

"There's some talk," answered the soldier, "that somebody from our own trenches went out there and cut those wires. Just how he could have done it without being found out, I don't know, but it was plain to us all this morning that the thing had been done."

"Have you any suspicions as to the one who did it?"

"We don't know that it was *one* fellow, there may have been two or three in the job. Some of us

have our suspicions about a man who is said to be right here in this place.”

“Now?” spoke up Bob quickly.

“Yes, that is he was here at the last report.”

“Do you know his name?”

“Yes.”

“What is it?” inquired Bob leaning forward in his excitement, a feeling which was manifestly shared by his brother.

“We’re not supposed to mention any names.”

“Do you want me to tell you who it is?” spoke up Bob.

“Yes,” answered the soldier evidently surprised by the question.

“Is the first letter of his name H?” asked Bob.

“I told you I shan’t tell you what his name is,” replied the soldier. The expression of surprise, however, that appeared upon his face strengthened greatly the suspicion which both the Cook boys in their hearts had for Hoffmann. And after they had left their comrade and thoughtfully were walking along the little street even Harold was unable to shake off his fear that Hoffmann might indeed be the dangerous character that Bob insisted he was.

On the morning of the following day the fears

and suspicions in the minds of the boys were further strengthened when still another small body of troops came from the trenches. Wearied, as the men were by their labors one of them was still so keenly excited over an occurrence of the preceding night that he was unable to remain silent.

He insisted upon telling Lieutenant Harold that in spite of the report of the cut barbed-wire the Germans had sent a small patrol against the very place in front of which the wire had been cut. In response to Harold's questions the soldier said that no further signals had been displayed and nothing more had occurred to arouse the suspicion of the men in the trenches that a traitor was in their midst.

It was now time for Harold to return to his duties in the trenches. Already he had recovered from the effects of his former experiences and was eager to go back. "Every minute we spend there," he explained to Bob, "may mean that the war is just that much shorter. Peace cannot come too soon to suit me, if it is of the right kind."

"What is the right kind?" inquired his brother.

"You know as well as I do. We've got to put an end to this thing or it will put an end to us. If we don't smash these fellows in the other

trenches it will mean that they will smash us and if they do there's nothing to stop the Germans from marching straight into Paris just as they set out to do when they first started this world war."

"But they aren't going through," declared Bob positively. "You haven't forgotten what the word at Verdun was, have you?"

"I have not," replied Harold with a smile. "'They shall not pass.' If they do pass, why it will be only after every Yankee has sold his life dearly. There won't be enough of the Boches to count when that time comes. Bah," he added, "how I hate the beasts. Do you know, Bob, I would willingly give up my life this minute if I could only put about five of them out of the world before I leave?"

"Look there, Harold," spoke up Bob quickly, "there comes that man Burnett. He looks as if he was headed straight for us."

Bob's prophecy proved to be true. Burnett at once left the street and started for the little house.

When he drew near he stopped and standing awkwardly, said to Bob, "That machine of yours is almost ready for you."

"Who did the repairing?" inquired Bob.

"I did. I fixed it myself," answered Burnett. "I don't dare leave those things to others, for there are some men around here who can't be altogether trusted."

"Are you suspicious of any one in particular?" inquired Harold.

"I don't know that I have any right to say that, but there's one man who doesn't act as if he was very much in love with the work the United States is doing over here."

"Is his name Hoffmann?" inquired Bob in a low voice.

"How do you know? What made you think of him?" demanded Burnett abruptly.

Bob laughed, disregarding the frown of his brother who did not approve of his reference by name to any suspected man.

However, Burnett soon departed, leaving the boys still further confirmed in their belief that Hoffmann was a dangerous man and that it was their duty to consult Captain Carter at once and inform him of the peril which at any moment might beset the lines from the treacherous work of the suspected soldier.

CHAPTER XIV

AT THE LISTENING POST

CAPTAIN CARTER was not in his quarters and the boys were unable to obtain any information concerning his return.

They soon departed from the place and as they moved along the little street they were both silent and each understood that the other was looking for some one to appear. It was unnecessary for either to mention the name of the person, for both understood that Hoffmann had made himself more thoroughly suspected by recent events than even he had been before.

On their way they stopped at the hangar and the man who was there in charge informed Bob that Burnett was making the repairs on his machine and that it would be necessary for him to be seen before he would know whether or not he could return in the aeroplane to the flying squadron.

“I must find this man,—Burnett,” said Bob quickly. “It may be that I ought to start to-night.”

"You don't know where he is."

"Of course I don't," laughed Bob. "If I did I shouldn't have to look for him. But I ought to see him and find out just how much remains to be done on my machine."

Harold readily assented and the boys after two inquiries were informed that Burnett was billeted in the little house in which Hoffmann also was staying. Neither of them was sorry to learn that the man whom they suspected also was there, for they might obtain another opportunity to question him or to learn a little more of his recent deeds.

Already the death of Harrison apparently had been ignored by the soldiers. Such an event was too common to create a lasting impression, especially so since the men were constantly changing, new squads of weary men returning from the trenches for a rest, while others who had been given their opportunity were going back to the front. Because of this fact there were frequent changes in the makeup of the soldiers and the sole reason why Burnett and Hoffmann had remained was because both were considered expert mechanics.

The mystery of Harrison's death, however, had

not been entirely forgotten by Lieutenant Harold. No further information had been received nor had any other man fallen in a similar manner. There was of course a bare possibility that a stray bullet might have been the cause of Harrison's death, but to Harold that chance seemed too remote to be worthy of serious consideration.

When the boys arrived at the house they were seeking they found Burnett there, but Hoffmann was not present.

"How long shall I have to wait for my machine?" asked Bob as soon as he entered the house.

"I told you it was almost ready," said Burnett gruffly.

"I know you did," assented Bob, "and that's the very reason why I want to know how much more there is to be done."

"I cannot tell," growled Burnett, who for some unexplained reason appeared to be in extreme ill humor.

"But I want to get back."

Burnett growled as he said, "If I was alone I would have had it ready for you this morning."

"Aren't you the only one working on my machine?"

150 BOB COOK'S BROTHER IN TRENCHES

"I am the only one that is *supposed* to be working."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why, I'm afraid there are other men who may be doing things when I'm not here. That's the reason why I don't leave now."

"But there isn't any one billeted here except Hoffmann," suggested Lieutenant Harold.

"You have told the truth, young man."

"Then the only one who could do anything to the machine besides you is Hoffmann."

"You have said it," growled Burnett.

"Do you think he's trying to damage it?" inquired Bob quickly.

"I'm not saying anything except that I'm just telling you that I've got to be on the lookout all the time. I don't intend to have anybody else spoil a good piece of work and then give me the credit for the damage if your flying machine breaks down before you have gone very far."

"Is everything all right now?" inquired Bob.

"It was the last time I looked at it," answered Burnett.

"How long ago was that?" asked Harold, who was annoyed by the manner of the man before him

though he was unable to assign a reason for his feeling.

“Just before sunset. I don’t work on the machines after dark. We can’t have any lights here and besides it’s too delicate to tinker with unless you know just what you’re doing.”

“Where is Hoffmann now?” inquired Harold.

“That’s more than I can say.”

“Haven’t you any idea where we can find him?”

“Do you want to see him?”

“Not particularly,” laughed Harold, “but I would like to know where he is. He’s a very interesting man.”

“Huh!” retorted Burnett, “I can’t say as how I agree with you.”

“Do you know where he came from?” inquired Bob.

“I don’t know anything about him except what I have seen since I’ve been here. I can’t say that that is all I wish it was either.”

“What have you seen?” asked Harold.

“It isn’t so much as what I’ve suspected. Ever since Harrison was shot——”

“You don’t think Hoffmann had anything to do with that, do you?” interrupted Harold sharply.

“I’m not saying anything about it. I’ve a right

to my opinion and you have a right to yours. I'm just expressing my opinion, that's all."

"But what makes you think he knew anything about the shooting of Sam Harrison?" demanded Harold.

"I haven't said that I did know anything. I've tried to explain to you that I may have an opinion, but that's no more than my right."

Burnett had succeeded, in spite of the fact that he had made no specific charges against Hoffmann, in strengthening the suspicions of both his visitors. It was manifest now that he had no intention to say any more about his helper and Bob asked eagerly, "Do you think I can count on having my machine ready for me by to-morrow morning?"

"I think you can *not*," Burnett said sharply.

"When then can I have it?"

"I told you you might have it when it is ready."

Bob was annoyed by the indifferent manner of the man before him, but a glance from Harold warned him to remain goodnatured.

"All right," he said lightly. "I may count upon it by noon."

"Huh," said Burnett. "You can count upon it when it's ready."

Early the following morning Harold received word that he was to return at once to the trenches. This line was somewhat nearer the little hamlet in which he had been billeted than were other parts of the same trenches.

In response to the eager request of Bob, who declared that he would be free for a time, as his machine was not yet ready, Harold promised to do his utmost to obtain the privilege for his younger brother to visit the place in which he was to be stationed for two or three days.

After he had explained to the captain the position which Bob held in the flying corps, consent was given for Bob to accompany his brother although he was not to be permitted to remain long or to do more than inspect some of the strange structures which the men had made.

“This is the quietest day on our front since General Pershing took over this sector,” reported Lieutenant Harold after he had entered the trenches and then returned to the place where his brother was awaiting him. “There wasn’t anything going on last night except the regular patrolling and a little sniping. One man was wounded, but that was an accident. Now,” he added, “I have obtained permission for you to go

with me. I'm to be placed in one of the advanced listening posts. I'll take my stand in the front and you will be several feet back of me somewhere in the sap."

Bob was unable to conceal the excitement which instantly seized upon him. To be in the trenches was an experience which he had not expected to have. Nor would he have been able to obtain the privilege had he not already manifested his loyalty and bravery by what he had done in his service in his aeroplane.

Harold's caution to be silent was not required. Breathlessly and on tiptoe Bob followed his brother until at last he arrived at the spot he was seeking. There he was left by the young lieutenant, who himself passed on to the listening post which he was to occupy.

In spite of his fear, for Bob was unable to conceal from himself the fact that his hands were trembling, he was impressed by the change which had come over his older brother. To Bob, Harold had long been the personification of most that was worth while in life. On the football field, in his classes, even when Harold was a prize speaker in the school contest, in each case it had seemed to Bob that his brother excelled all his competitors.

Indeed, his indignation when the prize for speaking was not awarded to Harold was an experience which at this moment flashed again into his mind and he even smiled as he recalled the good-natured manner in which his brother had received the announcement.

In a brief time Harold disappeared from sight. It was a comfort to Bob to know that he was not far away, but even his brother in a measure was forgotten when he began to devote his time to the purpose for which the listening post had been established.

For a time nothing unusual occurred. There was the roar of the distant guns, the crackling of rifles not far away, but there was no great excitement and yet at any moment there might be an onrush of the German soldiers. The listening post had not been established for idle curiosity. Although Bob was in a less exposed and important place, nevertheless he was doing his utmost to hear any sounds that might suddenly arise.

His nerves had not become quieted and it seemed to the young aeronaut that every part of his body was tense. It would have been difficult for him to explain, or even to describe the feeling which swept over him.

And yet Bob Cook was not one to lose his head. Already his experiences had taught him that the man who remains cool was the one who in the main was less subjected to danger.

At that moment, however, he noticed a sudden movement not far before him. Instantly he was persuaded that one of the Boches was approaching the trench. Without hesitating a moment Bob seized the hand grenade which had been left with him and hurled it in the direction from which the unexpected movement had been seen.

CHAPTER XV

WOUNDED

BEFORE the excited young aviator dodged back to safety he was horrified when he discovered that the man standing near the spot where he had hurled the grenade was none other than his own brother Harold. The young lieutenant also was keenly aware of the peril in which he was at that moment.

Without losing his self-control the young officer instantly seized the grenade which had fallen at his feet, and savagely hurled it toward the German trenches. He acted almost without thought.

The grenade had gone into the air only a few yards when with a loud report it exploded, the small bits into which it had been broken being scattered on every side. The explosion was so near and at the same time so severe that Harold was shaken by the report. He struggled forward a few steps and then fell to the ground.

Horried by the sight, Bob Cook, unmindful of his own peril and that he might be a mark for the sharpshooters in the nearby trenches of his enemies, instantly darted forward to the help of his fallen brother. He was delighted when he approached the spot where Harold was lying to see him attempt to rise.

Harold glanced behind him at the same moment and as he discovered that Bob was approaching, instantly his thoughts were of the peril of his young brother, although as yet he was scarcely able to speak. "Go back! Go back!" he called hoarsely.

Bob, however, was unmindful of anything save that his brother was still alive. It was impossible for him to discover whether or not he had been seriously injured by the grenade. He had seen him fall and that fact of itself was sufficient to convince him that the explosion had not been entirely in vain.

Disregarding the warning, Bob still ran forward though he was crouching low as he advanced. Such action was almost instinctive on the part of every American soldier. Perhaps this was due to the influence of the years when their ancestors were contending with the savage warriors of the

forests, or it may have been due to the desire to make of themselves the smallest possible targets at the time.

In a moment Bob was by the side of his brother. "Are you hurt?" he inquired in a tone that only partly expressed his agony.

"I don't know. I don't know," murmured Harold, who was still unable to rise.

"I'll pull you back," suggested Bob. For a moment the intrepid boy glanced in the direction in which he knew the trenches of the Germans had been made. He was aware that he was a mark easily seen against the background of the low-lying land. Somehow he was not as frightened as he thought he should be when he had pictured to himself the possibility of his being in the front line. In a measure the peril of his own special feat did not seem as great as that which beset his brother, who much of his time was in the trenches.

Indeed, now that he was doing his utmost to rescue Harold it was of his brother's danger he was thinking more than of his own. Exerting all his strength and seizing Harold by his shoulders he slowly dragged him back toward the listening post. It was not more than six feet distant, and yet Bob

was convinced that never before had two yards covered such an extent of territory.

Steadily he drew toward the place he was seeking and when a moment later he had succeeded in gaining the spot and was aware that neither he nor Harold had been shot, the reaction came and for a moment Bob found himself trembling like a leaf shaken by the wind.

His anxiety, however, still was his uppermost feeling and quickly he began to examine Harold to discover whether or not he had been seriously injured by the exploding grenade.

Two other soldiers approached the place at this time and by their combined investigations they were convinced that as far as outward manifestations were concerned Harold had escaped serious harm. The shock had been the cause of his fall and in falling the thousand missiles of the grenade had passed over him.

"I shall not go back to the hospital," declared Harold when one of the soldiers suggested that he would be better cared for if the surgeons could look after him. "I'm all right," he repeated. "You let me stay right here."

By this time, however, his captain had been in-



“Seizing Harold by his shoulders he slowly dragged him back”

formed and came running toward the spot where Harold was seated.

He was quick in his decision that there was no other course to be followed except for the young lieutenant at once to report to the hospital.

“It’s impossible for you to tell whether you’re all right or not,” said the captain. “You have no marks on the outside, but you don’t know what has happened to you inside. You must go back for an examination anyway.”

Reluctantly the young lieutenant was led away, Bob himself accompanying him at the suggestion of the captain.

When they arrived at the base hospital whither they had been carried in an ambulance, much to Harold’s disgust, a speedy examination was made by the surgeon in charge. “You’re all right, young man,” said the doctor, when his examination was complete. “You ought to rest up for two or three days, because you have had a tremendous shock. You’ll be all right, however, at the expiration of that time.”

“I must go back now,” said Bob, an hour later. “My machine was to be ready before noon. If I can get some one to go with me I’m going to start straight back for the place where I belong.”

"Don't let Hoffmann go with you," suggested Harold warningly.

"No danger of that," laughed Bob, who was greatly relieved now that it was plain that his brother had not suffered any serious harm. "I would like to have Burnett, but I don't want Hoffmann."

"I'm not so dead sure about that," said Harold.

"What do you mean?" inquired Bob quickly.

"Somehow I'm not convinced that Burnett is an angel. He may be perfectly straight, but I don't like some things I've seen."

"What?" demanded Bob.

"I can't talk about them now," said Harold wearily closing his eyes as he spoke. "I know you'll be on the lookout," he added, "and I don't need to say any more. Good-by," he added, extending his hand toward Bob, who now that the time for his departure had come was dreading the final leave-taking.

"Good-by, Harold," replied Bob, as he grasped his brother's hand.

In silence the clasp was broken, each boy looking keenly into the eyes of his brother. Both were aware of the peril that surrounded them. This might be the last time either would see the

other. And yet this was a part of the fortunes of war and they must meet it like men.

Abruptly and without once glancing behind him Bob departed from the hospital, stopping only to secure a promise from an orderly that he would keep him informed as to Harold's progress and condition.

Outside the building Bob found an ambulance which was to be taken back to the little hamlet where he had been staying the last two nights and easily obtained consent to accompany the driver.

This driver Bob soon discovered was a taciturn young student from one of the western American colleges. He had volunteered to serve with his unit, but the experiences he had undergone evidently did not render him more talkative. He replied briefly to two or three questions Bob asked of him and then lapsed into a silence which was not broken throughout the ride.

Without reporting at the house in which he and his brother had been billeted Bob at once made his way to the hangar. He discovered that no one was near his own machine and at once began his inspection. Somehow the words of his brother warning him to be on the lookout against Burnett as well as against Hoffmann, although Bob did not

agree with him in his fears, nevertheless caused him to make an unusually careful inspection of the 'plane.

While he was engaged in this occupation Burnett himself approached. "What are you doing?" inquired the mechanic.

"I'm just inspecting my machine and seeing if you have finished everything."

"It is all ready for you," said Burnett shortly.

"You think I do not need to examine it then?" inquired Bob, standing erect and smiling as he spoke.

"You can take my word for it."

"I'm not disputing that," said Bob, "but I like to see for myself just what I'm up against. Sometimes a man forgets and I have even known men who sometimes made mistakes." The young aviator was smiling and there was no venom in his words. Burnett, however, was angered by what he had heard and advancing to the side of Bob he said, "I'll go over every detail with you if you want me to."

"That's all right. That's mighty good of you," assented Bob, who still continued his investigations.

In a brief time he was convinced that as far as

he could discover, everything about the 'plane was as it should be.

"I'm ready to start now," he said as he glanced at the clouds to discover the direction in which the wind was blowing. "I think I'll wait until I have had something to eat," he added, "and if you don't mind I wish you would go and bring me something."

"I don't mind a bit," said Burnett, whose good nature apparently had been restored. "Look out," he added a moment later in a low voice. "Here comes somebody who mustn't be left alone a minute with that machine."

Bob glanced up and to his surprise saw Hoffmann approaching.

CHAPTER XVI

BOB RETURNS

BOB was equally surprised when Burnett abruptly departed from the place. He had not once glanced behind him and the call which Bob almost gave him was checked as Hoffmann drew near.

Bob was aware that the newcomer also was watching the departing Burnett. His face, however, was expressionless and the young aviator was unable to decide whether it was with relief or suspicion that Hoffmann was regarding the departing mechanic.

In a few moments, however, Burnett had turned the corner of a building and was no longer to be seen.

"Is your machine ready?" inquired Hoffmann, brusquely, as he turned to Bob.

"Yes," answered Bob. "I have been looking at it, though I haven't finished my examination. Burnett says everything is in apple-pie order."

Hoffmann made no response, but at once began to inspect the various parts of the machine.

Surprised as Bob was by his actions he did not speak and keenly watched Hoffmann as he inspected the various parts of the aeroplane.

It was evident that Hoffmann was out of temper. In response to Bob's questions he replied gruffly and then only in monosyllables.

Meanwhile his inspection was most thorough. Indeed Bob was impressed by the carefulness with which the man inspected every detail.

"You find it all right, don't you?" demanded Bob somewhat loftily when at last Hoffmann finished his task.

"I do not," replied Hoffmann slowly.

"You don't? What's wrong?"

"Do you know anything about the machine yourself?"

"I ought to know,—something at least," answered Bob sharply.

"Then come here and look at these wires. Do you know what would have happened after you had gone up four thousand feet?"

Bob did not answer, but instantly approached the man and followed his direction as he ex-

amined the wires to which his attention had been called.

Almost as if they had been cut by a file two of the slender holding wires of the great wings had been cut. Only a small fraction of the wire had been left intact.

For a moment Bob was chagrined at the thought of his own failure to detect what had been done. A moment later his sole feeling was one of rejoicing at the discovery of the dastardly work.

"Do you know who did that?" he demanded turning almost fiercely upon Hoffmann as he spoke.

"I do not," answered Hoffmann slowly. He was apparently neglectful of the young aviator, for he was at once preparing to remedy the condition of the wires.

"What are you doing?" demanded Bob quickly as he saw Hoffmann at once preparing to restore the damaged wires.

"I am obeying orders."

There was nothing more for Bob to say and in silence he watched the man as he worked steadily. Question after question forced itself upon the mind of the troubled boy. Who had been guilty of cutting the wires? If he had flown it was quite

likely that Hoffmann's words would have been fulfilled. Under the pressure of a strong current of wind the wires doubtless would have broken and the wings would have buckled. In the event of such a mishap there was no question in Bob's mind as to the outcome.

Apparently the picture of the falling machine was seen in his imagination and yet the boy was seriously troubled by the fact that it was Hoffmann who had discovered the defect. Both he and Harold had been suspicious of the man for a long time. How was it possible that he could have damaged the wires and then at the same time been the one to discover the damage? Did his conscience trouble him? Was he simply repenting of the evil he had done?

The questions were too subtle for Bob to answer. In silence he watched the man as he continued at his task and when at last the wires had been repaired Bob was in such a state of mind that he was uncertain whether or not he ought to start. "There you are," said Hoffmann, as he arose and confronted the young aviator. "I think you're all right now from top to bottom."

Bob's fears in a measure were allayed and yet the suspicions he had cherished against Hoffmann

were still strong. If the man had found wires that had been tampered with, for there was no question that they had been cut, might it not be possible that other parts of his machine also were wrong? He had joined in the later inspection and was unable to discover anything out of order. In a brief time he declared his readiness to depart and prepared to leave the hamlet.

The young American soon found that his feeling of nervousness was leaving him. As he climbed higher toward the heavens and discovered that every part of his machine apparently was working smoothly he even began to enjoy the new sensations. It was a relief once more to be in the air. Far beneath him he saw the American trenches and the little improvised hospital to which his brother had been taken. Bob's confidence, however, that Harold was not badly injured and in a few days would be able to resume his place, was so strong that the thought of his plight speedily was ignored.

On and still on flew the swiftly moving machine. There was scarcely a cloud to be seen in the sky. Across from the enemy lines there were no signs of the approach of his foes. Indeed, Bob, for a moment, if he had been equipped with bombs, thought

that he would enjoy a flight behind the German trenches. He laughed as he pictured to himself the surprise of the Huns if he should drop bombs in the rear of their formations.

He was now moving rapidly. In a brief time he would be back again in the place from which he had started. He had telephoned concerning the mishap which had overtaken him and also just before he started had sent word that he was coming. What a marvelous system the telephone work of the army was, he thought. What strange places were made for the receivers in all sorts of apparently impossible localities! The wires had been strung so that like the nerves of a body the great wire force was in touch with every part of the army. Indeed, Bob recalled the remark of Harold that the telephone system in the army was like the nervous system in his body. If he was wounded in the foot the announcement instantly was flashed to his brain and his whole body suffered in consequence.

Still Bob was unable to discover any enemies. This fact was strange because the day was clear and his own flight was within plain sight. Perhaps his machine was looked upon as too insignificant to demand the attention of the Boches. The

suggestion irritated the young aviator and he glanced for a moment behind him, almost hoping to discover the approach of a German flier.

Bob's experience was so limited, however, that he was by no means confident he would be a match for a skilled or experienced enemy. He had not even dreamed how soon he was to be pitted against one of the foremost German airplanes.

At last he was aware that he was nearing the place he was seeking. As he dropped toward the ground he saw also that there was unusual activity about the spot. By this time he had forgotten all his fear concerning his own machine. It had behaved beautifully since he had started and not a mishap had occurred.

As he began his descent, however, the young aviator was startled when he became aware that something was wrong with one of his wings. When he was high in the air Bob well knew that his own peril was less than when he was trying to land. Indeed, the supreme peril of the aviator increases markedly as he draws closer to the earth.

For a time Bob Cook ignored all his theories in his efforts to bring his machine safely to the ground. He was only dimly aware of the excitement about the hangar and for the time was not

interested in the assembly, now plainly to be seen below him.

Bob's fear now was that his engine might fail. As he drew the nose of his 'plane up into the air for a moment he was fearful that a collapse would come. For a brief instant the machine trembled and stood motionless as the power of the engine was hardly sufficient now to overcome the force of the wind and the attraction of gravitation.

Slowly he dropped backward and then in a moment found that he was making several involuntary flights, even his steering apparatus seemed to have gone wrong. A quick glance below revealed the interest of the crowd which now was watching his approach. Several times his 'plane circled as it steadily dropped toward the ground.

By great good fortune as he approached the earth the power once more came back to his engine, the great wings seemed to right themselves and almost before he was aware of what had occurred he found himself safely at the landing field.

Quickly his friends rushed to his relief. Bob, however, by this time had in a measure recovered from his alarm and was doing his utmost to appear calm. As he stepped once more upon the

ground some of the machinists quickly took his machine in charge, greatly to the relief of the young aviator.

At that moment Albert Rice, another flier who also had come from High Ridge, approached Bob and said, "How far have you been?"

"Only a few miles," answered Bob.

"Don't you want to go out with me?"

"Where are you going?" inquired Bob quickly.

"We're going to make a raid. Jack can't come with me. I need some one to manage the gun."

"Of course I'll come," said Bob quickly. "You arrange for it and I'll be ready. How soon do you plan to start?"

"We're going out within five or ten minutes. The plan is to cut across the lines and then to drop some bombs behind the town."

"I'm with you," called Bob excitedly.

It was to be his first experience as an active participant in a squadron and he was eager to assume his share. In a brief time he had returned and the half-dozen machines were ready to start.

It was not long before Bob had taken his seat prepared to use the gun which was so mounted that the shots were to pass between the blades of the propeller.

CHAPTER XVII

THE FIGHT IN THE CLOUDS

IN a brief time the squadron had risen and was flying high above the ground.

His recent experiences had deeply stirred the heart of Bob Cook for this was to be his most serious flight. He glanced at the face of Albert and saw that his companion was elated, but at the same time exceedingly serious. Without doubt some of the machines which were setting forth toward the German lines would not return.

Meanwhile the squadron was steadily mounting. There were seven in the entire fleet and when they had gained a height of 3,000 feet signals were displayed for formation.

Formed like a flock of wild geese the 'planes turned eastward. In advance was the machine which Bob knew was in the control of Lieutenant Mulford. Many a time he had talked with the daring young officer and had been eager to accompany

him on some of his perilous expeditions. Already this dashing young leader was known as an ace. There was no one whom Bob had met since he had arrived in France whom he more deeply respected or whose judgment he more highly prized.

The machines were making at least seventy-five miles an hour. Already the air was cold and Bob found that the protective garb he had donned was needed. Very heavy padded gloves were on his hands which rendered the movements of his fingers somewhat awkward. He was hoping as he glanced a moment at the gloves that they would not interfere with his activity when later he should be called upon to use the gun. The thought of the gun caused him to look again at the little weapon. How harmless it seemed to be! And yet he well understood how deadly would be the effect of its shots if he found his mark.

The gun was stationary. The aim would depend entirely upon the skill of Albert as a pilot. In the letter which Bob had written home during the time of his prolonged stay with Harold he had explained this phase of the work, for his father had inquired concerning the maneuvering required when he had a contest with his enemies. Albert, however, was one of the most skillful pilots and

Bob was confident that his chances at least would be as good as those of his foe.

The signal now was given for the fleet to mount still higher. Upward the great birds flew until Bob saw that they were at least 10,000 feet above the earth beneath them. It was not long before he was able to discern forces of the Germans. There were faint outlines too of the trenches which had been dug by the persistent enemy. He was so high, however, that if he had not been skilled in this work he would have been unable to distinguish any of the outlines.

The fleet, however, did not pause. The flight now became swifter. They were moving at least eighty-five miles an hour. Neither of the boys had been told what the destination was to be, but the fact was manifest that bombs had been placed in the aeroplane and that the gun also was likely to be used, and Bob had no difficulty in concluding that some place of importance was about to be attacked.

In the mist below him Bob distinguished several little hamlets. The flight, however, at this time was so swift that he gave slight heed to what he saw. The air was now intensely cold and already his hands were somewhat numb. Keenly

he watched the nearby clouds which might be the hiding-place of German 'planes that had been sent forth to meet them. Frequently French or American machines had been suddenly and unexpectedly attacked by an enemy who had been lying in wait behind some great cloud.

As they passed on, however, the presence of no enemy was discovered and the spirits of the two boys accordingly arose. There was a keen exhilaration in the very movement of the 'plane which now seemed almost like a thing alive.

Again the speed was increased and the fleet mounted still higher. Bob saw that a height of twelve thousand feet had been registered. No signal, however, had been given for a change in the direction in which they were moving, and the great structures, almost like things that were alive, held steadily eastward.

At last a signal was given for the speed to be slackened. Far away beneath them Bob saw a village which he was positive must be at a considerable distance behind the trenches of the Germans. Was this place to be the point of attack?

The question speedily was answered. "That's Saarburg," shouted Albert. "That must be the place we are going to bomb."

Bob's excitement instantly increased. For one who had never flown far behind the German lines he was remarkably steady. His hand was not trembling nor did he have any feeling of fear. He was, however, keenly aroused by the sight of Saarburg as well as by the suggestion of his companion.

The fleet now was scattered. Orders had been signaled for every one to circle the town and drop bombs upon the place. It was strange, the young aviator thought, that no enemy 'plane had appeared. Would the Germans permit the little city in Lorraine to be spoiled without any attempt to defend it? If so it was the first occurrence of that character of which Bob had heard.

He speedily was busied with his task of dropping bombs. Although the fleet was still high above the place the houses and streets were plainly discernible. Bob even thought that he could make out the forms of people moving along the quaint streets.

The squadron was still at least ten thousand feet high. It was difficult to discover just how correct the aim of the gunners was. Bomb after bomb was dropped and occasional bursts of smoke were seen, but whether these were due to passing

locomotives or were the effects of the bombs themselves it was wellnigh impossible to determine. The attack continued several minutes. Bob had dropped all the bombs except one in his 'plane when he was startled by an exclamation from Albert.

"There come the Boches! They are after us," he shouted.

In his excitement, Bob hit the heavy gloves which he had taken off while he was dropping bombs. He had placed them where he thought they would be safe, but his sudden action caused them to fall.

For a moment Bob in dismay watched the falling gloves and ruefully glanced at his hands. Already the intense cold had made his fingers numb and his hands were swelling. What he might be able to do with the gun in case of attack seemed somewhat dubious. He glanced in the direction indicated by Albert, and counted eight 'planes swiftly approaching. Toward their own 'plane one of these enemies was driving in from the side and a moment after Bob discovered its approach he fired his gun. The bullets also whizzed close to the machine of the young Americans and as yet Bob had been unable to get his piece into action.

In a brief time, however, he succeeded and as Albert changed the direction in which they were flying and now was headed straight towards the enemy Bob turned a stream of bullets into the Germans. A cry of alarm came from Albert at that moment. The German returning the fire also had sent a stream of bullets, some of which punctured the wings of the machine in which the Americans were flying. The sound of the bullets as they struck the cloth was distinctly heard. Even Bob paused a moment as with bated breath he looked to see whether or not any serious damage had resulted.

To his relief the great bird apparently had not suffered from the hail of lead and iron. At all events, it quickly responded to the control of Albert and there were no signs of a collapse.

“Shoot! Boy, shoot!” shouted Albert in his loudest tones. “You have them in range. Now this is your chance.”

Instantly Bob fired a fresh stream of bullets. Before the first drum was exhausted the machine of his enemy doubled and then began to spiral. Like a bird with a broken wing it fluttered and flopped and its speed increased as it fell. Sud-

denly there was a flash of smoke and flame that appeared in its wake.

Too excited to give voice to their elation the young Americans watched the descending machine which speedily was wrapped in flames. There could be no question as to the fate of their enemies. Perhaps already they had perished in the flames.

For a moment Bob glanced behind him and saw that the other 'planes in the fleet were far away. Apparently the lieutenant had met with some mishap or believed himself to be so greatly outnumbered by his enemies that he was speeding for home. It was soon manifest that the pursuers were not equal to the task. In spite of the danger which beset him Bob was almost fascinated as he watched the race. His interest, however, was speedily broken when suddenly Albert shouted, "Look out! Here comes another one after us."

Bob glanced in the direction indicated by his comrade and far away discovered a 'plane which confidently was holding straight for them.

"We must run for it," shouted Albert, "I am not sure enough of our machine. It may have been hurt when the other fellow hit us."

It was speedily evident that even if the 'plane

had been struck by the bullets from the machine guns, apparently it had not been seriously damaged. Swiftly and still more swiftly it darted through the air, making for home. Bob was aware that one of the fleet had already met with misfortune. He saw that it was beyond the control of its pilot and was falling in such a manner as to insure its landing within the lines of the Germans. Was a similar fate to overtake him? The question was supreme in his thoughts, and he anxiously turned to Albert urging him to make all the speed in his power.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PATROL

IN the meanwhile the injury from which Harold was suffering proved to be only temporary.

In a brief time he had recovered from his shell-shock and was ready to return to his place in the trenches.

As a consequence, two days after the occurrence Lieutenant Harold was once more in the front trenches watching for snipers.

It appeared that many snipers' posts were in the ruins of old buildings which had been destroyed by knocking down with shells the shelters over the heads of the Germans. Snipers also had found hiding-places in bushes or in shell-holes. Many of these troublesome pests had been routed by the American sharp-shooters, who with unusual daring had succeeded in making an end of the annoyance. Several times they had succeeded in locating some of the positions held by these troublesome Germans and when daylight appeared

they had demolished the position with their artillery fire.

This task had been nearly completed when late in the afternoon Harold once more resumed his place at the front.

Nor had he been long there before Captain Carter sought him out and explained what was about to be attempted.

"There is an advanced German trench that still troubles us," explained the captain. "I do not know but I had better let you and three or four men try it out and see what you can find there."

"We shall be glad to go," replied Harold quietly.

In spite of his words and manner, however, the young lieutenant was aware of the great peril that confronted him in the proposed enterprise. It was thoroughly understood among the men that these patrols not only incurred great danger but that it was not unusual for such a party to return with only a few of the men that had started, even if they were successful in returning at all.

However, the young lieutenant thoroughly understood that this was the work which must be done. And Americans too must be prepared to act as bravely as the French and English forces on

either side of them. It was therefore, with a clear appreciation of the peril that was about to confront him that Harold sought out Corporal Wells and two privates who were to accompany him on the perilous errand.

The night promised to be unusually dark. In a way this was a protection, but there was a compensating increase in the danger also, for the star-shells, because of the intense blackness of the night, rendered all the more distinct any objects within range.

The wire entanglements in front of the trench in which Harold and his men were waiting had been carefully cut in such a manner that those who did not know would not have suspected it was different from the adjoining places.

Cautiously and slowly the young soldiers climbed out of their trenches and crouching low advanced toward No Man's Land. At any moment they might be discovered by the watchful foe. Their nerves were tense and in spite of their coolness of manner every one was watching for the expected star-shells which suddenly might be thrown. Without being seen the four men picked their way carefully across the ground intervening between the hostile lines and at last found them-

selves within touch of the wires which the enemy had stretched in front of their own line. Still moving with the utmost caution they crawled beneath this line and then slowly drew near the most advanced of the German trenches.

Their eyes by this time were somewhat accustomed to the dim light. No one had molested them, nor had any sign of the presence of their enemies been seen. They now approached the trench so closely that they were able to look down into it.

As far as appearances went the place had been abandoned, nevertheless, the young American adventurers were positive that snipers somewhere were hidden nearby.

At last Harold whispered, "We must drop down there into that trench. Don't make any noise."

No reply was made, but as Harold led the way and silently slid down into the trench, he was quickly followed by his three companions.

When they arrived at the bottom of the trench they stood motionless and silent for a brief time listening intently to discover if their approach had been seen, or if any of their enemies were in the immediate vicinity.

Silence rested over the region. Even the boom-

ing of the distant guns served here only to intensify the stillness. It was strange, the young lieutenant thought, that the trench should present every mark of having been abandoned.

Silently he drew from his pocket a small electric torch which was lighted for one brief instant and held close to the ground. By its light the footprints that manifestly had been made recently were plainly seen. The light was extinguished almost before it was possible for an enemy to discover it, and then, for double protection, the four young Americans moved quietly and quickly toward their left.

When they had advanced fifteen feet they again halted, two facing one direction and two the opposite, as all four watched and listened for signs of the coming of their enemies.

The strange silence, however, was still unbroken. The boom of the distant cannon still was the only sound to break in upon the stillness of the night. Apparently the Germans had abandoned the trench in which the Americans were now standing, but why they should have done so was a question for which as yet the young lieutenant had not found any answer.

When several minutes had elapsed and still

there were no signs of an attack the young lieutenant again whispered a command and the four men slowly proceeded through the trench. They frequently stopped to listen for sounds which might indicate the presence or the coming of other foes. The sounds, however, were not heard and at last Lieutenant Harold concluded that the trench indeed was also unoccupied.

Convinced that he had discovered the true condition of affairs he again whispered his command and cautiously the four soldiers climbed out of the German trench.

On the parapet they discovered a rifle, which after a hasty examination was found to be loaded. It was pointing in the direction of the American trenches, but there was not a German near to fire the gun.

Without explaining his purpose Harold quickly took the rifle with him and started, with eyes keenly watching, and the men crouching as they ran, they moved back across No Man's Land.

There was peril now that they might be mistaken by their own soldiers for Germans. A signal had been agreed upon, however, and this the young lieutenant gave as he came near the American trenches.

His signal speedily was answered and with renewed confidence the four boys pressed forward and soon once more were safe in the trench from which they had departed.

Captain Carter was there awaiting their coming. About him too were assembled several other officers who were deeply interested in hearing the report which the daring young lieutenant had brought. When he had set forth on his expedition the officers had promised to remain two hours at the place where he had left them. That he should have returned so soon was a matter of surprise to them all, but their congratulations were none the less hearty when Harold speedily related their adventures and described what they had discovered in the trench they had visited.

Puzzled by the report the captain said, "What do you think it means?"

"I'm sure I don't know," answered Harold. "We must have crawled through two hundred and fifty feet of the trench. There wasn't a German anywhere to be seen."

"How long do you think they had been gone?"

"Not very long," replied Harold. "We lit a torch for a minute and saw some footprints in the mud. They were fresh and that shows the

Germans have not been gone a great while. Why they went, I cannot tell you. You asked us to go out and find what was there. We did not find anything except the empty trench and this rifle which I brought back with me."

The gun was passed from hand to hand and examined with interest.

"It is a typical German rifle and was made in Berlin," explained the captain after he had examined the weapon. "It's in good condition, too. Well," he added, "if you didn't do anything more you at least have subtracted one rifle from the supply of the Germans. But you did a good deal more than that. You found out what I wanted very much to know and now I am ready for the next step."

Harold did not answer though he looked with keen interest into the face of his superior officer.

"I'm going to send a small expedition to find out what the condition is off to the right of those trenches where you were."

"It will be daylight soon," Harold ventured to suggest.

"Yes, I know, but I think we can finish this up before the sun rises. You and your men have had some experience to-night. Do you want to go on

this expedition? I am not detailing you, but leaving it to your own judgment whether or not you'll join."

"Of course we'll go," answered Harold promptly. "How many men are to start?"

"Ten," answered the captain promptly. "I'll put you in charge, if you wish."

"I shall be glad to serve," answered Harold quietly.

The result of the interview was that a half-hour later the lieutenant, together with the corporal and the two men who had accompanied him in the former expedition now, together with six additional comrades taken from the ranks, once more started out through the protecting wires and moved steadily across No Man's Land.

Again they approached the spot where they had slid into the German trenches. Still no sight of their enemies had been obtained. Perhaps the success which had attended their other efforts, now made them somewhat bolder. Harold was doing his utmost to restrain the impatience of his followers and induce them to use every precaution. Although all were aware of their peril, somehow the spirit of daring had entered every one and

they were inclined to be less mindful of the precautions which usually were taken.

Turning now to his right Harold led the way as the men cautiously proceeded through the apparently abandoned trench. Again they frequently stopped to discover whether or not their coming had been seen.

After a half-dozen such stops Harold suddenly discovered that there had been a break of some kind in the trench. Very likely it had been caused by the explosion of some great shell which had landed there wrecking the entire structure. At all events he was convinced that they were on the border of an unusually large shell-hole. Here snipers might be concealed, and indeed he was fearful that he had discovered one of the very places which Captain Carter had indicated as containing nests of the detested sharpshooters.

Speaking cautiously and yet in such a manner as to make certain that he was heard, Harold leaned over the edge of the shell-hole and called to the Boches who might be concealed within it, "Come up out of that and surrender."

To his amazement his call instantly was answered. In the dim light he discovered a huge German climbing out of the hole and then he ap-

proached the place where the Americans were waiting. The German soldier was holding his hands high above his head. He whiningly called, "Kamerad! Kamerad!"

"All right," answered Harold in English, for he was unable to speak the language of his foes. "Come this way."

Suddenly and without warning the German drew a revolver when the corporal's back was turned and shot the young American in his back.

Rage instantly placed Harold's men almost beyond his control. Angered, as well as outraged by the dastardly deed they were ready to throw themselves into the shell-hole, after the treacherous German soldier had quickly been disposed of.

Harold now took a bomb in his hand and crawling to the edge of the shell-hole cautiously inquired, "How many are you down there?"

A voice answered him, but he was unable to distinguish what was said.

Without waiting for any further information, however, the young lieutenant instantly threw his bomb into the hole, shouting as he did so, "Divide that among you."

CHAPTER XIX

A STEALTHY APPROACH

THERE was a report that was heard many yards away. In the confined space the bomb had exploded with a noise that was terrific. Above the sound of the explosion, however, there were heard the cries and calls of men. Only a moment had passed before the shouts ceased and silence again rested over the region.

The early morning light was now appearing and the young Americans were able to distinguish one another as they stopped, horrified by the results of Lieutenant Harold's throw.

Before a word was spoken Harold, drawing his revolver, leaped down in the shell-hole. His companions gathered about the border and stared down into the dark pit. Not a word was spoken. Anxiously they waited for word from their young leader, while each man continued to hold his revolver ready for instant use, if occasion demanded.

Not many minutes had elapsed when Harold rejoined his comrades. In reply to their unspoken questions he smiled as he said, "There were five Boches in that shell-hole."

"What happened to them?" inquired one of the soldiers.

"There isn't one left."

"Served 'em right! Men who follow such a leader as they had, who would hold up his hand to surrender and then shoot in the back the man that had spared them, deserve all they got."

Harold said no more except to order the men to withdraw from the spot.

When they had regained the position they first had held at the time when they entered the trench, he stopped and called his men close to him for a whispered conference.

"It's plain," he said, "there are not any of the Huns in this trench."

"That's right, Lieutenant," said the soldier who before had spoken. "What do you think it means?"

"I am trying to figure that out," answered the young lieutenant.

Harold was seriously perplexed by the discovery he had made. Why a trench equipped as

the one in which they now found themselves should have been deserted, it was difficult for him to understand. If the trench had been destroyed, as frequently the German trenches had been by artillery fire, he could understand why the line for the most part had been abandoned. But there were only spots that had been ruined. For the most part the trench was in good condition and capable of holding at least one hundred and fifty men.

"I think we have done all we can do for the night," said Harold at last. "I want all of you to go back to your company."

"Aren't you coming with us?" inquired the soldier who still was the spokesman of the little band.

"I'm coming a little later," explained the lieutenant. "Hold on," he added, "I'll have two of you stay with me. I want one of you to go back to that shell-hole where I divided that bomb among the Germans. He must stay there until he hears my whistle. It may be two minutes and it may be two hours. I want you," he added turning to another soldier, "to take your stand about half the distance between here and the shell-hole. You'll stay there until you hear my whistle. If

I blow one blast, that means you're to come at once."

"Come where?" inquired one of the men.

"Right here where we are now. I'm going to stay here and watch for a while. I'm suspicious that the Boches have gotten up some kind of a trick in leaving this place as they have and I want to find out what it is if it is in my power."

The men at once took the positions assigned them while the remaining members of the detachment made their way in the dim light across No Man's Land. Harold watched them as long as they were to be seen and then at once prepared himself for the difficult task which confronted him. Inactivity was even more difficult for him to endure than the peril which attended their more active efforts. He watched and waited until half an hour had elapsed and then gave a low whistle which speedily summoned his companions.

"I've decided," he explained, when they had rejoined him, "that there isn't any use in staying here any longer. It will be light in a little while and as soon as the sun rises we can watch almost as well from our own lines as we can from this place. Besides," he added, "it will be safer for us if we go now than it will be a little later. We

have cleaned out one nest of snipers, but there may be two or three more of such cases and if there are, we'll make too good targets for the sharpshooters if we go when they can see us more plainly."

Hastily climbing out of the trench, Harold and his two companions, crouching as they ran, swiftly passed through the wire which had been cut. They stopped long enough to readjust the entanglement sufficiently to deceive an observer. When this had been accomplished they again ran swiftly toward their trenches and without a shot having been fired slid back into the places they had formerly occupied.

"I'm so sure," explained Harold to Captain Carter, "that there's some trick afloat, that I want to stay right here for an hour or two yet."

"Haven't you had enough to satisfy you for one night?" inquired the captain.

"I want to stay here a while," answered Harold.

"You'll be pretty much alone," suggested the captain. "As soon as I found out that the trenches over there were not occupied I sent some of the men away because there was a heavy call for them off to our right."

"That's all the more reason why I should stay here," declared Harold.

"Have it your own way," said Captain Carter quietly, as he turned and departed from the place.

For a time the silence was almost oppressive. The young lieutenant found that his thoughts were wandering. He was thinking of Bob. Had he made a successful trip to his airdrome? The question recalled Hoffmann and the suspicion with which Bob had regarded him. The thought of possible treachery increased the anxiety of the young officer. He had all of an older brother's sense of the right to protect his younger brother. It was almost impossible for him to conceive of Bob's acting in an independent capacity, and yet his brother was taller and stronger than he.

Harold's thoughts instantly were ignored when, in the light which now was stronger, he thought he detected movements on No Man's Land directly in front of him. He climbed a little higher and recklessly peered over the edge. In a brief time he was convinced that he was correct. Like moving shadows he discerned a body of men moving across from the trenches of the enemy toward the very spot where he himself was standing. The men crouched low, but he had no question that

they were enemies. And how many there were of them!

Almost fascinated by the sight, he watched them closely as they advanced to the place where the wire entanglement had been cut. Indeed, they apparently were so confident, that Harold suspected they were aware of the place to seek. Had they been informed of the fact that the wires had been cut? Again, for a moment, there flashed into the mind of the young officer thoughts of Hoffmann and Burnett. Had one of them been a traitor? If he had, there was no question in his mind that Hoffmann was the guilty one.

The forms of the Germans before him now prevented Harold from thinking of anything except the approach of the enemy. How many there were of them! Although he could not plainly discern the outlines he was convinced that there were at least forty in the approaching party.

He hesitated a moment whether to fire upon the advancing men, or to send a call for help. The sight, however, was almost fascinating and Harold found it was well-nigh impossible for him to turn away his eyes even for a moment.

In advance crept a soldier who apparently was the leader of the party, and Harold smiled grimly

as he thought of the common report that the Germans were sparing of their officers who were reported to follow, rather than lead, most of the dangerous expeditions made by their men.

He was keenly excited when he saw the men advancing through the wire entanglements. It was evident that they knew just where to go. This would not have been possible had they not been informed by some one of the place which had been cut. Harold, angered at the thought of the treachery of some one in or behind the American lines, now was so keen that for a moment he was almost unmindful of the peril that confronted him. He was the only watcher for a distance of at least sixty feet. The captain himself had explained that he had withdrawn men from the vicinity for use in another position not far away.

At that moment Harold saw the leader of the Germans suddenly climb over the bank and drop into the trench. He was not more than twenty-five or thirty feet distant. Still the young lieutenant did not leave his position. He watched four more of the Germans as they stealthily followed the example of their leader. The remainder had thrown themselves upon the ground and were motionless until the last of the party of

five had disappeared within the trench, then five more advanced in the same cautious manner, and hastily climbed into the trench and doubtless joined their comrades. This made ten who were in the trench and were close to him. It was high time for him to act. It would not be long before the entire force of forty would be together in the trench and with their coming there was great danger of damage to the lines as well as of the loss of many lives.

The young lieutenant was tempted to warn his fellow soldiers, who were not more than one hundred feet away at his left. The Germans now were between the guards. At his right he was confident there were none of his own men within fifty feet.

His thoughts were abruptly broken when, in the dim light he saw stealing toward him a crouching German. He himself was hidden from the sight of the approaching men by a hollow in the excavations. It was impossible, however, for him long to escape detection. The blood was bounding through his veins and his heart was beating so loudly that it seemed to him the enemies must hear the sounds.

Still he did not leave his post.

The leader of the Germans now had partly arisen and was advancing more boldly. Evidently he was as puzzled to account for the fact that the trench was not strongly held as Harold himself had been when he had entered the German trench.

The approaching Boche now was not more than ten feet away. The time for action had arrived and the young lieutenant prepared himself to meet the effort he was about to make.

CHAPTER XX

A DOUBLE SUMMONS

IT is time for us to return to follow the fortunes of Bob Cook, whom we left with his friend Albert doing their utmost to land safely after their exciting fight in the clouds.

Both boys had been so deeply interested in watching the fall of the German machine that they had not fully realized the danger which now beset them. Now, however, after their enemy had fallen to the earth, they instantly were deeply concerned for their own safety.

The expression of Bob's face was tense as he watched Albert. The latter had not once glanced aside, for the condition of the wings of the great bird was now the supreme problem. If they had not been too badly riddled by the shots of the Germans it was still possible for them to bring their machine to the earth. On the other hand, the strain of their swift descent would soon determine whether the wings could endure the pull.

The descent of the machine was so swift that these thoughts passed through their minds without the young aviators realizing how rapidly they were drawing near the ground. Soon they clearly distinguished the outlines of the airdrome and saw their friends standing nearby and watching their maneuvers. The critical moment had arrived. Meanwhile Bob was unable to do anything to assist his companion. His hands were swelled to twice their normal size. He was not conscious of any pain in his fingers, though as he glanced at them he was scarcely aware that they belonged to him.

Off to their left he saw two other flying machines approaching the airdrome. Apparently, they had escaped without harm and the daring of their pilots was manifest in the deeds which they performed in their descent. It was plain that the pilot of each was highly elated over the outcome of the struggle and was doing many tricks which in ordinary times would not have been seen.

Bob and Albert now were not more than three hundred feet above the ground. Bob was aware that Albert was even more fearful than he had been any moment since they had begun to fall. Indeed, the anxiety of his companion was the chief

source of Bob's fears. He had never known Albert to lose control of himself, but the excitement which now possessed him bade fair to overpower him.

Twice the 'plane shifted from the direction it had been following and when it was righted, in each case it was done in a manner that increased the fears of Bob. However, he had not once spoken since their descent began. They now were able to hear the calls and shouts of the men below them. It was plain that they already had received some word concerning the fall of the German plane. In spite of his own peril, Bob's heart swelled with pride as he thought of the success which had attended his effort. Already he pictured to himself the welcome which would be given them both when they once more safely landed.

Again the machine threatened to pass beyond their control. It lurched heavily to one side and threatened to loop the loop without any direction on the part of the pilot. Once more it righted itself and the descent continued. They were now within one hundred feet of the ground. An expression of grim determination suddenly appeared upon Albert's face and it was plain that

he had decided to take the one chance that was left.

As if the aeroplane was in as good condition as when he started, he resolutely drove it forward, and to the waiting Bob it seemed only a moment before the landing was safely made.

A great shout went up from the spectators when this was done and Bob himself joined in the hoarse cry, though it was difficult for him to explain why he was doing so. Men rushed forward to help the boys alight. They were patted upon their backs and arms by the excited group and there were repeated calls for Bob to relate the experience through which they had passed.

"You'll be called up by the commandant. You're going to hear from this. It's a great day in your life. We're proud of you, Bobbie," were expressions that were heard on every side.

The pride in the heart of the young aviator naturally was great when he heard these words of praise. It was true that he had been the cause of the death of his two enemies, but in the great game of war this was looked upon as a necessary part of the struggle. It was impossible for Bob, however, to picture to himself how he would have felt if this event had occurred in the days of

peace. He had been the cause of the death of a man! And now he was elated instead of being terrified by what he had done.

He reassured himself, however, as he thought that he had acted as he had because there was left to him no other choice. He had not begun the war, nor had America sought any cause for the quarrel. His country had been attacked, her innocent citizens had been sunk without warning, her ships had been torpedoed, and her men had been wantonly killed. It was to protect the world from such horrors that America had raised and sent her great army to assist the Allies in their struggle against the unspeakable evil. Never, since the dawn of history had so many dastardly deeds been recorded as in the war which the German military party had thrust upon the world.

However, Bob was not inclined to be unduly philosophical. The success of his venture and the warm words of praise of his comrades were still sounding in his ears and finding a warm response in his heart. It was good to be honored by men who appreciated the full measure of his daring.

As soon as possible both aviators escaped from their friends and turned to the little house where they were billeted. The reaction from their in-

tense excitement had come and both were feeling nearly exhausted. Indeed, it was not long before both boys were glad to seek their beds, where they both slept soundly until the following morning.

Even then their first appearance was the occasion for renewed congratulations. When Bob compared himself with some of the successful French aviators, some of whom had brought down two score of enemy 'planes, he laughingly referred to his own efforts as being slight.

"It's a beginning," declared Albert. "You have to count one before you can count forty."

The day passed without any summons for the boys to appear at headquarters. Perhaps both were somewhat disappointed at the failure to recognize their bravery, for although they had mildly protested against the declarations of their friends that they would be summoned, each somehow in his own heart had confidently expected to receive such word. When it did not come both felt somewhat aggrieved, although they did not betray by their manner the momentary feeling which had entered their hearts.

The next day, however, the longed-for word came and both Bob and Albert were ordered to report the following morning.

Thoroughly rested from the strenuous labors through which they had passed, the boys appeared before their superior officer and were modest in their relation of the fight in the clouds. The interest which their story aroused, however, was plainly manifest. The compliments were much more limited in number than when first they had returned to their comrades. As the words meant more, however, both boys were well content.

“I have just received a message,” explained Major Wilder, as he called Bob to one side, “and it concerns you.”

Bob, whose thoughts were still centered upon the recognition he had received, laughed as he said, “Is there still something left that hasn’t been said?”

The expression upon the face of the major, however, caused him to glance keenly at the officer. The major was looking seriously, almost compassionately at the young aviator and Bob instantly felt that he was about to receive bad news.

“Yes,” explained the major, “I have just received word over the ’phone that something has happened——”

“To my brother?” interrupted Bob sharply.

The major nodded quietly in response and then said, "I'm sorry to say it is."

"Is he——" began Bob, but he stopped, as he was unable to complete the sentence.

"No," replied the major, "it's not as bad as that. I've been informed that he was out on patrol duty last night and was wounded. I was not informed how badly but I was told to ask you to go to the hospital where your brother now is. I can send you forward with an automobile."

"Is that all you have heard?" inquired Bob in a low voice. "I wish you would tell me everything, just as it is."

"I have done so, my boy," answered the major, who was older than most of his fellow officers. "I have given you every word that was spoken over the 'phone."

"Can't you call up again and find out anything more?"

"Impossible," said the major shortly. "The 'phones are very busy and there are too many things to be talked of this morning to permit their use for anything else. You have received word that your brother was wounded, but the very fact that he wants you to come where he is and that I have been asked to release you shows at least that

he is still able to be interested in what is going on."

"That may be," acknowledged Bob seriously, "but it may mean that things are so bad that they want me there before they are worse."

"It isn't necessary for you to look at that side first anyway," said the officer. "If what you fear comes, you'll have to bear it just the same as other men have. If it doesn't come, you'll have had your worry for nothing. There's one thing you don't have to do," he added.

"What's that?" inquired Bob.

"You don't have to face the worst until the worst comes. Meanwhile you have just had word that your brother is alive and that he personally has asked for you to come to him."

The conversation ceased as Bob turned to follow the directions which the major had given him as to the place where he was to find the automobile which was to start for the little hamlet in which Harold had been billeted. There was a base hospital nearby to which the wounded young lieutenant had been sent.

CHAPTER XXI

HAROLD FALLS

WHEN Harold had discovered that the approaching German would speedily be aware of his presence if he did not first make himself known, he instantly opened fire upon him.

By this time five Germans had entered the trench. Harold had watched them all, fascinated by the sight as one after another had dropped over the bank. So fascinated had he been that for a time his own peril had almost been ignored. Now, however, that the German officer who was leading the band had approached so near him, he was aware that it was a choice between one or the other shooting first.

In spite of the fact that thirty additional Germans were outside the trench, the moment Harold fired confusion appeared in their midst. The young lieutenant's automatic was working rapid-

ly and, although the light was dim, he had no difficulty in finding his mark. The Germans in advance had instantly turned as their leader fell to the ground and frantically were endeavoring to make their way back to the place where they had entered.

Two more fell before the point was gained and as the remaining men swiftly drew near they were saluted by the loud calls of their comrades outside.

“Come out! Come out!” called the excited soldiers. Their words of encouragement were not entirely needed, but needless to say those who were within the trench were doing their utmost to obey, even before the command had been heard.

“Come out! Come out!” again shouted the outside Germans.

By this time the shouts had aroused men in distant parts of the trench who were running to the aid of those who they suspected had been attacked.

There was danger now that Harold himself might be shot by his friends. Once before he had withdrawn into a slight hollow in the trench to avoid such a danger. When, however, the advancing Germans had turned and fled, the young

officer, unmindful of his own peril, had forsaken his retreat and started in swift pursuit.

He was aware now that the firing was becoming general. From every part of the trench men had become informed of the invading band of Boches and were firing on them. The Germans, however, made slight response, for the supreme desire in the heart of every one, apparently, was to place the greatest possible distance between himself and the trench from which he had fled.

Harold now whistled shrilly, giving the signal by which the Americans informed their comrades of the fact that there were friends and not enemies coming. Again the young officer paused and glancing over the edge of the bank fired once more at the Boches as he saw them floundering and struggling, frantically endeavoring to make their way through the opening in the wire entanglement and across No Man's Land. It was soon plain that part of the band would safely gain the refuge of their own lines.

Hand grenades then were seized and hurled by the excited American soldiers. Shouts also were heard above the roar of the guns and the confusion in the immediate vicinity was intense.

Order was restored, however, by the coming of

Captain Carter. Instantly demanding the cause of the confusion, he quickly gave his own commands, with the result that speedily the lines were reformed. For a brief time the captain hesitated as to whether or not he should send a party in pursuit of the fleeing Germans. He speedily decided not to make the attempt. He was suspicious now that the Germans had left their trench vacant with the purpose of drawing on the Americans and leading them to believe that the place was undefended. Now, he concluded, when the sudden attack revealed the fact that this plan had failed, they had resolutely rushed across the intervening territory, relying upon finding the Americans unprepared for a sudden onslaught. How badly awry their plans had gone was evident now, for twelve bodies of the fallen Germans were to be seen in No Man's Land, while within the trench there were two more dead and one wounded.

The entire adventure had taken only a very few minutes and the former condition of apparent inactivity had returned before Harold and his comrades fully recovered from the excitement of the unexpected attack.

There was great elation, however, among the American soldiers over the story of the bravery

with which the young lieutenant alone had thrown himself against the advancing line.

"I think you'll hear from this," suggested Captain Carter when he and Harold were by themselves once more.

"I'm not foolish enough to say I shouldn't be mighty glad to have something like that happen to me," answered Harold. "But honestly I can't say that I deserve it."

"You're not the best judge of that."

"Perhaps not, but let me tell you, Captain Carter, I didn't stop to think whether I was afraid or not, and I know I must have been dreadfully scared. I watched that Boche leading the way up the trench and before I really knew what I was doing I was after him. It wasn't a question of being brave, it was simply a matter of life or death."

"That's all right," answered the captain, "you'll let the colonel decide that for you."

Suddenly the captain stopped abruptly in his conversation and pointing toward No Man's Land said in low voice, "There's one poor fellow out there who isn't dead. He seems to be suffering, too."

Harold instantly turned and looked in the direc-

tion indicated by his friend. For a moment, in silence he watched the contortions of the soldier who evidently was suffering agonies.

"I can't stand that," said Harold after a few moments. "I can't help it even if he is a Boche, I'm going to try to get him out of that."

Captain Carter hesitated and then made no protest.

The feeling between the contending enemies had become so bitter now that seldom did one soldier help an enemy even if the latter was placed entirely within his power.

Instantly Harold crawled to the top and holding his handkerchief above his head moved toward the place where the German had fallen.

The purpose of his attempt must have been plain even to the men in the German trenches. For a time the intrepid young soldier moved on without molestation. He was fully aware that many eyes were watching him and that at any minute some enemy might make him his target.

He had covered more than half the distance and not a gun as yet had been discharged. Was there a new day dawning? Had the time come when the bitter hatred of the preceding days was to be forgotten and the bravery of the young American

soldier in attempting to rescue a wounded enemy to be recognized as a source of honor by both armies?

Harold's face was deadly white, but his step did not falter. Still holding up the white handkerchief he increased the speed at which he was moving and began to run toward the man who now was only a few feet distant.

A moment later he had gained the spot he was seeking. As he glanced into the face of the fallen soldier instantly he was aware that his attempt had been in vain. The man was now free from his suffering, for life had fled. The German was dead.

Relieved by the sight, the young lieutenant instantly arose and turned toward his own trench. His back now was toward his enemies and the thought deprived Harold of a measure of his courage. When he had been moving with his eyes toward them somehow he had been able to control his every action. Now, however, when he was unable to see what was occurring behind him, a sudden panic seized upon him and he began to run at his topmost speed.

He fled across No Man's Land and was within a yard of his own trench when suddenly the report

of a rifle fired to his left was heard and the daring boy was pitched forward, falling face downward upon the ground.

Instantly a wild yell of rage arose from the men in the American trench. The young lieutenant had been exceedingly popular among his men, every one of whom now was willing to brave any danger in order to avenge his death. In a moment the reports of many rifles were heard and answering shots came from the German trenches. Hand-grenades, too, were thrown, although no men were to be seen.

It was at this moment, when Captain Carter, after looking intently at the fallen young American, turned to several of the men who were near him and said, "I don't think the lieutenant was killed. Isn't there some way or somehow one of you men can bring him in?"

"There is, Captain," spoke up a young Irishman, "I'll go out and get him myself."

"Wait a minute," ordered Captain Carter, as he turned again and looked critically at the place where Harold had fallen. "I was wondering," he said, "if it would not be possible for some one to cast a rope over his body and pull him in without exposing himself. There are snipers and

sharpshooters now all along the line and if any one exposes himself trouble will certainly come."

The suggestion, however, was not considered feasible and the young Irish soldier waited until there was a lull in the shooting and then suddenly threw himself over the embankment and crawled toward Harold, who had not moved from the position in which he had fallen.

Before the Germans were fully aware of what was being done he had grasped the hand of the fallen lieutenant, while his own feet had been seized by his comrades and both men were speedily drawn within the trench. At that moment there was a renewed burst of fire and the hand-grenades were showered upon the American trench and loud shouts were heard from the Germans.

These matters, however, were ignored by the excited soldiers in the American trench. They were eager to learn of the fate of Harold.

"I can't find the mark of any wound on him," explained Captain Carter, after he had made a hasty examination. "There's a little blood here on the top of his head, but it looks as if it were only from a bruise or a skin wound. Perhaps he was grazed by a ball or hit by a piece of shrapnel

and is not very seriously hurt. We'll get him off to the hospital and see what can be done for him."

Willing hands lifted the young lieutenant to the stretcher, which was speedily brought, and the young officer was carried to the rear.

Greatly to the delight of his attendants, the young lieutenant soon regained consciousness and when the ambulance arrived, which was to convey him to the base hospital, he was able to speak.

At the hospital the judgment of Captain Carter was confirmed, but the surgeon in charge ordered Harold to be left in his care for a time, and word at once was telephoned for Bob to come.

CHAPTER XXII

THE COMING OF HOFFMANN

THE anxiety in the mind of Bob Cook increased as he drew near the hospital. He was an imaginative boy and his intense devotion to his older brother now increased his fears. The message he had received had been somewhat uncertain.

It was, therefore, with a feeling of great relief that Bob learned when he entered the hospital that Harold was not seriously wounded. Indeed, in response to his questions, the surgeon explained that the young lieutenant would be out within a week or ten days. However, as Bob had secured a furlough for four days it was agreed by both the surgeon and Harold that the young aviator should remain at the hospital in order to assist in caring for his brother. His presence, too, was expected to help in the recovery of the wounded young officer.

Two days after Bob's arrival he and his brother

were sitting on the long piazza that extended across one side of the building. The afternoon sun beat in upon him and it was warm and delightful. It was manifest, too, that the patient was benefiting both from the change and the presence of his younger brother. The anxiety of Harold had seldom been concerned with what would happen to him. He felt a keen responsibility, however, for his younger brother and now that he had become the patient and his brother was in charge the condition was so reversed from what he was accustomed to observe that there was a quizzical smile on his face as he glanced at Bob. "It seems queer," he said, "that you should be here looking after me."

"It is strange," acknowledged Bob soberly. "Here we are more than three thousand miles from home. Neither of us knew just where the other was and yet just the minute there is any trouble, why here we are together again. It's wonderful, I think."

"So it is," acknowledged Harold, "but it isn't half as wonderful as it is pleasant. You don't know what it means to me to have you here. It's well enough when a fellow feels all right, but when

he is wounded or sick, that is the time when he wants some of his own people near him.”

Both boys were silent for a time, busy with their thoughts of the home in High Ridge. Each young defender had a vision of the dining-room in their far-away home. They pictured the quietness of the scene and the bravery of their mother and father as they faced the loneliness of their condition. And up to the time when the boys had left home the house had been the rallying place of many young people. There was activity and freedom which made every visitor at once feel at home. The contrast between what had been, and what now was the true condition, was too evident to be denied.

However, as neither Bob nor his older brother was inclined to be morbid, they soon roused themselves from such thoughts; and Harold inquired, “Bob, have you heard anything more about Hoffmann?”

“Not a word. Isn’t he here now?”

“Yes, he’s here, or at least he was the last I heard. It’s mighty strange about him.”

“Indeed, it is,” acknowledged Bob. “Why, we are suspecting him of the very thing which they tell us he is doing for the good of the army. It

may be that he's in the secret service, as I was told when he drove Andrews* out of camp. I can't help feeling, however, that if he does ring true, he has a mighty strange way of showing it."

"Sometimes he posed as Burnett, didn't he?"

"He did that, and that's the strangest part of all. The man Andrews, who was up with him, has gone. I'm so mixed up over the thing that I don't know whether I'm going or coming. What do you really think about it?"

"I'm as puzzled as you are."

"You really suspect that he had something to do with that sniping that killed Sam Harrison, don't you?"

"I confess I was a good deal puzzled when Hoffmann showed up there while we were searching the house."

"Yes, but Burnett showed up, too."

"So he did," acknowledged the young lieutenant. "One of them came around one corner and the other around the other corner of the house at the same time. You don't suspect they could have been working together, do you?"

"I hardly think that. At least, they didn't have any marks of wasting any affection on each

*See "Bob Cook and the German Air Fleet."

other. It's a time when no one knows who his true friends are. They used to tell me in school that every man in America was entitled to be considered innocent until he had been proved guilty. Now, here in the army, it seems to work the other way. You have to look upon every man as a rascal unless he can prove himself to be a saint."

"It is not quite as bad as that," said Harold with a smile. "But when you do find a man in the army that makes you suspicious of him you can't stop with any half-way measures. I wish the truth in this matter could be found out."

"Have you talked any more with Captain Carter?"

"He doesn't like to talk about it. It's plain enough that he doesn't think he's crooked."

"My," exclaimed Bob, "what a trick he could play on us if he should double-cross Captain Carter! I shouldn't want to stand in his shoes if he were found out."

"Do you know," said Harold, trying to sit erect in his eagerness and quickly falling back into his reclining position, "I hadn't really thought of it in that way. Just suppose that he is employed by the United States in the Secret Service and then suppose that while he is in that Service he's all

the time working for Germany. What a condition that would make."

"You're right, it would," exclaimed Bob. "I don't know of anything more we can do though, to find out about it, do you?"

"Didn't you find that the wires in your machine had been tampered with just the way your friend's were?"

"Almost the same," acknowledged Bob. "I had a close call. Mine was the third machine that had been fixed in some way. Some fellow with a file had cut the wires that held the wings. I don't know why it was that my machine didn't double up and send me to the ground just the way poor Hugh went."

"And yet Hoffmann called your attention to it and fixed it before you had a chance to fly."

"Yes, he did," answered Bob, "but I found when I got back to the airdrome that he hadn't fixed all the wires. If there had been a stiff breeze I should have gone to the earth just as sure as the sun rises."

"Are you sure about that?" inquired Harold in a low voice.

"Absolutely sure. We went over the machine from one end to the other and examined every

bolt and wire and even tested the wings to see if they had been cut. 'There comes the man now,'" Bob added quickly, as excitedly he pointed toward a man who was walking towards the hospital.

In silence both boys watched the approaching man and in a brief time both were convinced that it was indeed Hoffmann. Apparently, he was coming to the piazza. The boys had no means of knowing whether or not he was seeking either of them, but the fact of his coming was sufficient to arouse their criticism.

"You had better go inside," Bob suggested to his brother. "There may be more excitement out here than you ought to have."

"Excitement nothing!" retorted Harold sharply. "I'm going to stay right here and listen to what he has to say."

Neither of the boys spoke again until Hoffmann, who was slowly coming up the walk, apparently for the first time became aware of the presence of the brothers and at once turned aside to join them.

"How are you?" he inquired in his deep voice, as he glanced keenly at the wounded young lieutenant.

"I'm doing splendidly," replied Harold. "The Boches didn't get me that time."

"It wasn't their fault," spoke up Bob. Then, turning to Hoffmann, he inquired, "Have you had any more 'planes filed lately?"

"I understand there have been two or three such cases," replied Hoffmann.

"Did you find out before they left the hangars?" asked Bob.

"I found two," answered Hoffmann. "One of the other mechanics named Burnett found another."

"Who is this man, Burnett?" inquired Harold.

"I don't know whether he's an American or an Englishman. He's a good mechanic and knows his business," explained Hoffmann.

"Have there been any accidents around here lately in the air?" asked Harold.

"I understand there have been several," answered Hoffmann.

"Was it found out that they fell because the wires had been filed?"

"That's the report."

"It seems to me that it's about time this thing was run down. If there are men here who are doing such dastardly work as that, they ought to

be run to earth and then stood up against the wall and shot like any other traitors," said Harold.

"Has any one found out the sniper who shot Sam Harrison?" asked Bob.

"I believe there has been some report to that effect," answered Hoffmann. "Here comes Burnett," he added as he pointed to a man approaching along the quaint little street. "He may be able to tell you."

"Isn't it strange that these two men always hunt in pairs?" whispered Bob to his brother.

Harold, however, made no reply and both boys eagerly awaited the coming of the mechanic who had greatly increased the mystery surrounding the death of Sam Harrison and the damage which had been done to the wings of the aeroplanes.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LIGHT IN THE WINDOW

BURNETT did not seem in any way impatient as he drew near the place on the piazza where the boys were seated. If he was aware of the constraint which both Bob and Harold felt he did not in any way betray his knowledge.

“I was looking for you,” he said to Hoffmann.

“You are wanted over at the shop.”

“What for?” inquired Hoffmann.

“There’s some repair work on the major’s car.”

“I’ll come right along,” said Hoffmann, though he did not start.

“What about those filed wires in my ‘plane?” spoke up Bob, looking keenly at Burnett as he spoke.

“What about them?” growled the mechanic.

“Have you found out who did it?”

“No, I’m not a member of the Secret Service.

How should I know? I've got all I can do to attend to my own business."

"You seem to be doing that fairly well," retorted Harold, angered by the manner of the man before him.

"Maybe you'll learn how to do that, too, when you're grown up," retorted the mechanic. Harold's face flushed and his irritation increased when Bob, unable to control his feeling of delight over his brother's chagrin, laughed aloud.

"They'll find out who did that job," drawled Hoffmann, who to all appearances was unmoved by the anger of the boy. "There hasn't been any sniping going on around here lately," he added, "so you boys can save your strength for the trenches."

Again Harold's face betrayed his irritation. It was bad enough to be called a "boy" without having his younger brother nearby to take delight over the slight.

Meanwhile, Hoffmann was ready to depart, and as he walked down the steps he turned once more to the boys and said, "Don't be too hard on the man who caught the sniper."

"What did he mean?" demanded Bob, as he

looked eagerly at his brother after the two men had gone.

“I haven’t the remotest idea,” answered Harold. “It sounded like nonsense, didn’t it?”

“It was nonsense,” declared Bob, “and yet, I think both those men have some gray matter hidden away in their heads. They weren’t born yesterday.”

“You may be sure of that,” acknowledged the young lieutenant. “What I’m afraid of is, that we shall find it out to our sorrow.”

The conversation ceased as the boys watched the two mechanics walking slowly down the quaint little street. In a brief time both Hoffmann and his companion turned the corner and were no longer to be seen.

“Harold,” said Bob a little later, “I’m going to cut one day from my furlough. You’re just having a little vacation here and you don’t need me any more and there’s something I can do back where I belong.”

“That’s all right, Bob,” said Harold, “I think the men were a good deal more frightened over me when I stumbled and fell than I was myself. At all events, aside from the bruise on the top of my head, I don’t find I have anything the matter

with me. I expect to be back in my place within a day or two."

Much as Bob delighted in the presence of his brother, he nevertheless was eager to be back again in the task in which he took such delight. There was inspiration about the very fact of flying. Bob did not tire of the sensation. When he rose ten thousand feet above the earth, he declared he felt as much at home as when his feet were on the solid ground. Just how much of his statement was due to enthusiasm, he did not explain.

Late that afternoon Bob returned to his quarters, Harold having promised to send word to him by telephone if everything at the hospital was not progressing to his satisfaction.

So rapid was the recovery of the young lieutenant from the shock he had received, that three days afterwards he was permitted to resume his place in the trenches with his men. The surgeon had reluctantly consented, conditioning his permission, however, on a promise from Harold that he would not remain more than three hours a day in any place of danger, and also that he would report daily as to his condition.

The enthusiasm of the young lieutenant, how-

ever, was not as great as that of his brother. During his absence in the hospital there had been a second raid by a large force of Germans, with the result that several of the men in Harold's company had been killed and others severely wounded, had been taken to the hospital. The anger of the soldiers over the gassing of their comrades was intense. One of them explained to the young lieutenant that the vapor seemed to destroy the very tissue of the lungs. One young soldier declared that never would he forget the agony of his own comrade as he slowly was suffocating.

The fire, too, which the Germans had thrown, although fortunately it had not wrought great damage, had also served to intensify the anger of the young American soldiers. In return for such barbarous methods of fighting and such atrocious deeds as the Germans had wrought, they declared they would fight to the end.

The first day of Harold's experience in the trench after his return did not discourage him. He was so wearied when he was taken out that he was scarcely able to stand. However, he returned to his place the following day and was assigned a position in the trenches a little to the right of

that which before he had held. It was late in the afternoon when he came and he was to remain until after darkness had fallen over the land.

Harold was stronger now and the tiresome waiting did not affect him as it had the preceding day. There were occasional bombs dropped near the place he was holding and the roar of the great guns in the distance was unceasing. There had been no direct attack, however, made upon the place he was holding and when he prepared to withdraw he was not as weary as when he had returned the day before. He was moving directly behind Captain Carter, who had been on a tour of inspection in the trenches.

Suddenly the captain stopped as they climbed out of the trench to a place of safety. He touched Harold on his left arm and in a low voice excitedly said, "Do you see that light in that window yonder?"

"Yes, sir," replied Harold, looking intently in the direction indicated by his comrade.

"I believe that's a signal of some kind."

"Why do you think that?"

"Because the light is intermittent. You watch it."

Both officers became silent and motionless as

they watched the feeble little light shining from the window of a house which fronted in the direction of the German trenches. The captain did not speak when, after the lapse of a minute, the light suddenly disappeared.

“We’ll wait,” whispered Captain Carter, “and see if it doesn’t shine again in about a minute. If it does then we’ll wait a little longer and see if the thing isn’t repeated. If it is it will show plainly that it is meant for a signal of some kind.”

Harold’s excitement became intense when after the lapse of fifty seconds the light in the window again was shining. The young officer was convinced that the suspicion of his friend was well founded. This feeling became a conviction when, after a minute and a half had passed, the light again was dim and the darkness was unbroken. After another fifty seconds had passed the light again appeared.

“It’s time for us to find out about this,” declared Captain Carter. “That old house is pretty nearly ruined anyway, and I didn’t think any one had been left there. We’ll go up there and find out about it.”

The young lieutenant now was eager to join the captain and search the house of which they were

suspicious. They decided not to inform any one of their fears. If they should discover what they expected to find, then there would be need of reporting to their commander. If, however, they found that their suspicions were false, then they would be saved the effect of making an unconfirmed report of peril.

Hastily the two men drew near the little brick building. It was a tiny structure containing not more than four rooms at the utmost.

First, they passed to the rear of the house and stood for a moment near the partly ruined wall while they listened intently. Not a sound could they hear from within the building.

"Stay here," whispered the captain after a brief interval of silence. "I'll go around to the front and see if that light is still there."

Only a few minutes had elapsed when the captain returned and whispered to Harold, "The light is still burning and I'm sure it is a signal of some kind. We must go in and find out about it."

Both officers drew their revolvers and doing their utmost to proceed silently they entered the little building. Captain Carter insisted upon going in advance, but Harold was close behind him and as he was slightly taller than his comrade he

was able to see what might be discovered before them.

When they had entered, both stopped and again listened intently. The silence still was over all. Only the roar of the far-away guns broke in upon the stillness of the night.

“This is the way,” whispered the captain a moment later and he moved toward the upper room from which the light in the window had been seen.

Harold still was close behind, his revolver held in his right hand. With his left hand he was able to touch the body of the captain. The night was not very dark and they were able to find their way without difficulty.

Cautiously they mounted the low sloping stairway, peering intently ahead of them for the discovery of any man in the building. Thus far nothing had occurred to arouse their fears for their immediate safety.

They discovered that there was no railing about the top of the stairway and as soon as they had mounted a few steps they were able to see directly before them. The sight, however, which greeted their eyes was one which startled both officers. A moment later they hastily mounted to the floor

above them and with a shout dashed into the room in which they discovered the light which had aroused their suspicions when first it had been seen.

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

AT the moment when the two soldiers burst into the room some unknown parties outside, evidently suspicious of the strange light, had fired directly through the window. One bullet had found its way into the head of Hoffmann, who had pitched forward and now was lying dead upon the floor. Beside him, as Lieutenant Harold and his companion entered the room, Burnett was kneeling. It was evident that the latter was not only distressed by the fall of his companion, for he was sobbing, but that he also was alarmed for his own safety.

The consternation of Harold was great when, by the light that was blazing in the window he saw the two men of whom he had been suspicious and whose actions had so greatly confused him and his brother. What was the meaning of their presence? Had they been working together or had one man detected the other in a crime?

Burning though these questions were, the sight of the man lying apparently lifeless on the floor instantly demanded the attention of the newcomers. Burnett apparently was not startled by their sudden entrance and was devoting his entire attention to the prostrate Hoffmann.

"Let me see," suggested the captain as he, too, knelt beside the fallen man. "Take that light," he added, speaking to Harold, "and bring it here."

"No, no, do not take the light," spoke up Burnett sharply.

"Take the light as I told you!" repeated Captain Carter sharply.

For a moment it almost seemed that Burnett was about to leap upon the young lieutenant and prevent him from carrying out his directions. For a moment he arose and stood uncertainly, but as Harold instantly leaped toward the window he evidently thought better of his purpose and quickly resumed his position beside Hoffmann.

"The man is dead," said Captain Carter shortly, after he had made a hasty examination.

"Yes, he is dead," admitted Burnett, who again attempted to take the lamp from Harold's hands and return it to its place in the window.

"Leave the lamp here," ordered Captain Carter.

"But it belongs in the window," protested Burnett.

"It belongs where I tell you to place it," declared Captain Carter. "Now, then," he added, "I want you to tell me what this means."

"I don't know what you want," stammered Burnett.

"You can tell me here or after I have taken you to the guardhouse, just as you please. Personally, I think your chances will be better if you tell me the whole story just as it is, than it will be for you to face a court-martial."

Even in the dim light it was evident to both officers that Burnett's fears had returned in full force. All three men had placed themselves outside of the range of the window. Those who before had fired at the target presented by the light might again test their ability with their rifles.

At that moment, however, heavy steps were heard on the stairway and a moment later two more soldiers entered the room.

The surprise of the newcomers was great when they beheld Captain Carter and Lieutenant Har-

old. They glanced from one to another and then at the body of the fallen man.

"Did you fire that shot, Butler?" demanded Captain Carter, as he faced one of the newcomers.

"I did, sir."

"Well, you have proved yourself to be a good shot. The man is dead."

"Is that so?" stammered Butler. "We thought there must be something wrong because the light was changing so often. It would shine a bit and then it would be all dark again. We were afraid it might be a signal of some kind."

"I think your fears were well founded," said the captain dryly. "We shall soon know more about that," he added, not deeming it necessary for him to enter into a more complete explanation of the reasons why he and Harold had sought the place.

"Don't go, Butler, and you too, wait here, Hunt," said the captain as he spoke to both soldiers. "I would like to have you as witnesses, for my good friend Burnett here is about to make a statement which will interest you and may be of value."

Turning to the trembling Burnett, who had cast frequent glances of longing toward the door, Cap-

tain Carter said sharply, "Now then, we want you to give us your story."

"Hoffmann was a spy," declared Burnett. "He was slick. He was working for the American Secret Service and at the same time was paid by the Germans for the work he was doing for them."

"How do you know that?"

For a moment Burnett appeared to be confused. "I have the proofs," he said a little later, "and I shouldn't be surprised if you looked in his pockets now you might find some more papers that would back up what I have said."

"That's a good suggestion," said Captain Carter, turning to the young lieutenant. "Search his pockets and see what you can find."

Harold did as he was bidden and in one of the inside pockets of the dead man he discovered several papers which he at once extracted and handed his superior officer.

The lieutenant then held the lamp in such a manner that the captain was easily able to read the contents.

When he had finished his inspection he turned again to Burnett. "Now, then," he added, "I want your story from beginning to end."

"Yes, sir," replied Burnett, and then again became silent.

"You may give it to me here, as I said, or you can face the court-martial, just as you wish."

"I'll tell you now," said Burnett. "I met Hoffmann two years ago. We were then in Chicago. He was working for the Germans and he was a good worker, too. He had four brothers in this country and every one of them was busy."

"Do you know whether he had one in High Ridge?" broke in Harold.

"Yes, sir, he did. He worked for a man named Cook."

"That's just what I thought," exclaimed Harold, as he glanced a moment at the captain.

"Go on with your story," said Captain Carter.

"Yes, sir. That's right, sir. That's just what I want to do," said Burnett, whose fears now apparently were in a measure relieved, though it was not evident what had caused the change in his feelings. "Hoffmann was double-crossing the Americans. I thought I would try to do the same thing with him so I let him believe that I was falling in with his plan. Finally, he got me to promise that we would come over here and serve as mechanics at some airdrome. We have been

in three or more places since we landed in France. Hoffmann has worked in every place to the damage of the Americans and at the same time has managed somehow to get word to the Germans."

"Did you report this?" inquired the captain.

"Yes, sir, but he was working for the Secret Service so no one would believe what I said."

"Are you sure that he was not double-crossing the Germans just as he did the Americans?"

"I can't say for sure," answered Burnett. "Sometimes I thought he was. To-night he got me to come with him here to place this light in the window of this old house. I didn't know what it was for, but, of course, he must have meant it for a signal of some kind."

"You didn't know what it was for?"

"No, sir."

"Why, then, did you come?"

"Because I thought I might be able to keep him from doing some things that would hurt the Americans."

"You seem to have been a long time about it," spoke up the captain. "You say you have known him two years and yet, in all that time, you never have been able to catch him in anything that would convict him?"

"That's right, sir," answered Burnett. "I haven't. I have known what he was doing, but I haven't been able to get proof that would convince any one, not even the officers in the Secret Service themselves. I told you that I had reported to them, but not one of them would believe me."

"Now," said the young captain sharply, "tell us just what this signal was."

"I don't know for sure, but I suspect it is to mark the place toward which the Germans may either direct their guns or make a charge."

The captain for a moment looked sharply at the speaker and then said abruptly, as he turned to his companions, "The wisest thing for us to do will be to get out of this place. You come with us," he added, turning to Burnett as he spoke.

Obediently the men departed, Burnett, to all appearances, being as eager to leave as any of the soldiers.

"I'm going to leave him in your charge," said the captain to Harold, when they had come out from the building. "Take him to the major and tell him what we have found out. I'm going to report higher up."

Burnett refused to say more to the young lieutenant than he had already said in the house. It

was not long before Harold had turned his prisoner over to the proper authorities and a brief time afterward he was rejoined by his captain.

The interest of the two officers in the prisoner they had taken was speedily lost in the greater interest that arose because of a mighty thrust by the German army. Apparently, the purpose of Hoffmann had been fulfilled. That is, if he had desired to provide a marked spot toward which the soldiers of the Kaiser might direct their efforts. A heavy artillery fire had been maintained for an entire day, and now this was followed by a sudden advance.

Every American soldier was called upon suddenly to do his utmost. The scene which followed was one which Harold never was able to forget. More like beasts than men, the struggling soldiers fought. Sometimes it was hand to hand. Great clubs and long knives were used. At last, however, the German line gave away. There were many American dead left on the field and the number of those who were wounded was greater than had before occurred in any similar thrust.

It was not until the following day that Harold was able to see Captain Carter again. Fortunately both young officers had escaped serious in-

jury. Men by their sides had fallen and officers above and below their rank had been made prisoners.

The first words of the two friends naturally concerned the struggle and the losses which had been suffered. A moment later, however, Harold said, "How about that man, Burnett?"

"He's another one that tried to work the double-cross," answered Captain Carter. "He had the goods right on him. The papers which I found in Hoffmann's pocket convicted both men. Hoffmann was fortunate enough to get what was coming to him before we could get him. Burnett, however, has left the camp," he added significantly.

"Where has he gone?"

"That depends entirely upon the kind of a life he has been living. Naturally he won't have any difficulty in locating the place where the double-dyed traitor has taken up his abode."

The great struggle, however, was not yet ended. The experiences through which Bob Cook's Brother in the Trenches had recently passed had simply strengthened his determination to remain in the army until the end. This conviction was shared also by his younger brother. The experi-

ences, however, through which the two boys passed do not belong to the present tale. The record, however, has been kept and those who have been interested in the adventure of Bob and Harold may be glad to learn that in another story a more complete account will be found.

THE END

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